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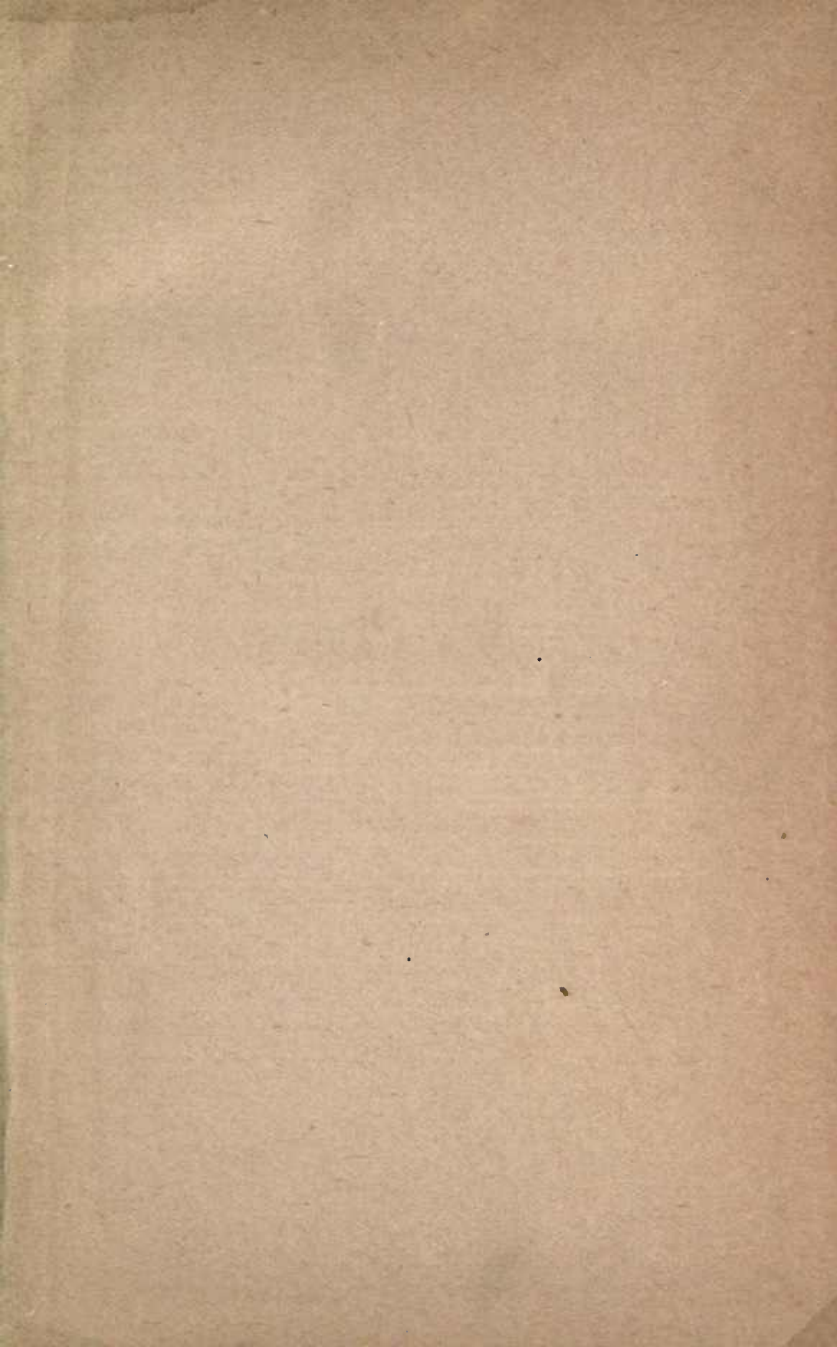
EDITION

"MAY BLES-
SINGS BE UPON
THE HEAD OF
CADMUS,
THE PHENICIANS,
OR
WHOEVER IT WAS
THAT INVENTED
BOOKS."

Thos Carlyle

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Oct. 2, 1949



W. L. Collins

OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY

A Novel

BY

MARY CECIL HAY

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OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

CHAPTER I.

More water glideth by the mill,
Than wots the miller of.

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

A STRETCH of highway lay white and level in the dusk of the September evening, and on its margin stood a low red tavern, whose glory departed with the last stage-coach, and which crumbled to ruin, as slowly, but as surely, as did its grand old neighbour there behind the ivy-weighted walls of Abbotsmoor. For a whole mile this wall extended before it was broken by the iron gates through which a view was gained of the lodges and the sombre avenue; and under this wall, in the September twilight, a travelling-carriage rolled upon the wide, white road.

Within a few yards of the iron gates, the horses were pulled up. The postilion, sitting square upon his saddle, looked straight along the road, as a well-trained post-boy should; the man-servant, seated with folded arms upon the box, and his eyes fixed upon the roadside tavern half a mile ahead; and neither of the men turned his head one inch when the carriage-door behind them was opened from within. No change upon their faces showed that they even understood why the horses had been stopped.

A gentleman descended leisurely from the chaise, turned and addressed a few low words to some one within, and then closed the carriage-door again quietly. The gentleman stood in the shadow as he gave his orders to the servant—

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stood in the shadow as he paused for a minute to watch the retreating vehicle—and was in the shadow still as he walked up to the gates of Abbotsmoor and tried them. Locked. Four gates there were in all—a high pair in the centre, and a single narrow gate on either side—but all locked.

He stood for a few moments looking round him in the dusk, and then whistled a call. The summons was answered at once. An old man came limping from the lodge, and scrutinised the visitor suspiciously, as shrewd old men will do when their sight grows dim.

"I heard the call, sir. I'm sharp enough to hear, but my sight fails me, so I can't tell who it is."

"A stranger and a traveller," the gentleman answered from without the gates, as the old man fumbled with the rusty keys, "and anxious, on his way past Abbotsmoor, to see the house."

"It's late for that," the old man muttered, with a feeble effort to turn the key in the lock; "we get but few visitors at any time, but they never come after sunset—and no wonder."

"You've opened this gate a thousand times, I daresay, but I fancy I can do it better. Let me try."

As the stranger spoke, he put one hand through the bars, and turned the key with ease; then he laughed a little at the old man's surprise.

"My ears are sharp to hear the difference in voices," the lodge-keeper said, eyeing this visitor with keenest interest as he entered the park, "but my eyes won't recognize faces now. Your voice has a homelike tone to me, sir, so I know it's English, though there's a richness in it that reminds me of the foreign countries I used to visit with my old master. And yet—I ought to know the tongue of the Far West when my own father was an American."

"Surely," the visitor said, "you have no need to look the gate behind us. Who would enter here in the dusk?"

"Who indeed?" questioned the old man, surlily. "No, sir, it was only habit. Such habit clings to a man after ten years of it."

"Ten years"—the stranger was pausing within the gates, and looking thoughtfully on among the shadows of the heavy trees—"only ten years. Then you were not here at the time of old Mr Myddelton's death?"

"Not I, sir—thank Providence for that! I was in Germany at that time, with my own old master. It was only after my eyes and limbs failed me that Mr. Haughton—the family solicitor, and a family connection, sir—put me here to keep the keys. It wasn't a post many cared to fill; it isn't a post many would care to fill—even half-blind cripples like myself—now that such a dark name rests upon the place."

"Who lived here at the time of the murder?"

The question was asked coolly, and the questioner's eyes did not come back from their gaze among the shadows.

"The woman who kept the lodge then, sir, died not long after the murder."

"Then all you know of that time is from hearsay only?"

"From hearsay only, sir. Who would wish to know it any other way?"

"Who indeed?"

The dusk was deepening in the park, and the shadows lay a little weirdly about the waters of the lake. The old man looked with curiosity after the strange gentleman as he sauntered up the avenue, quite slowly as it seemed, yet with a step which was far from purposeless or listless.

"It's a queer hour to come and view the place. Mostly people choose broad daylight when they come to see the spot where old Myddelton was murdered." So the old man muttered, while the stranger went slowly on towards the great desolate house, over whose history a veil of gloom and mystery hung.

"It almost seems," this visitor whispered to himself, as he passed up the silent avenue, "as if the mist of guilt upon the place, and this heavy lethargy of isolation and disuse, had wrapped themselves about me since I passed those gates. The horrible paralysis that stayed all life and motion in this spot has touched me too; or why do I not clearly follow out this plan, as I have followed others in my life? What is this feeling upon me which seems to stop me here at the very spot? 'Not to-night,' it says. Why not to-night? It is but the first link of a chain I have to follow link by link to its end. Can I begin too soon? This inexplicable feeling is at any rate unworthy of a thought."

As he argued thus with himself, uttering the thought

aloud in the evening silence, he raised his hat, and for a few minutes carried it in his hand as he walked on up the neglected, grass-grown avenue. The evening breeze rustled the green branches overhead, and with lazy enjoyment he lifted his face to meet it. It was a dark, grave face, full of determined purpose, yet most striking at that moment was its look of intense patience—not the spurious patience born of listlessness or indifference, but a steadfast, manly patience, born it might have been in a great repentance, or it might have been in a great wrong. It was a face which could wear other expressions, far different from—if not warring against—the quiet, manful power of enduring and forbearing, so plainly written there; but at that moment, raised among the dusky shadows, this was its only look.

The avenue at Abbotsmoor was nearly two miles in length, for though, as the crow flies, it would have been scarcely a mile from the lodge to the great front entrance, yet the approach was so curved and twisted that it doubled the distance. In old times neighbouring squires used to urge on old Mr. Myddelton the advisability of forming a new approach, straight as an arrow, from the lodges to the house; but their advice was laughed at grimly, and the old avenue kept its winding way.

So it happened that the visitor was within a hundred yards of the house itself when he caught his first glimpse of it. He made no stop in his thoughtful, unhurried walk; but there grew a look of keen intentness in his eyes, and there started into sudden life a line of deep and harassed thought between his brows.

"In spite of the changes," he said to himself, his full gaze on the house, "I shall remember it all more clearly on this spot."

The scene which lay before him was grand even in its utter desolation, and picturesque even in its heavy, haunted gloom; for on neither the empty building nor the untrodden grass lay any trace of that deed which had made this spot a shunned and isolated one.

"In this weird light, and at this lonely hour," the stranger whispered to himself, "I shall see it just as it should be seen."

'There were no steps to mount, no terraces to tread. The

mansion stood low on the wide, level park, but it was none the less a grand and an imposing structure, viewed from that last point in the irregular avenue.

The visitor trod more slowly now across the lawn, up to the wide oak doorway (locked securely against his examining hand), then slowly on, past the long row of windows belonging to the ground floor, the shutters of which were so heavily barred. He counted them as he sauntered past the front of the house—eight, between the door and the corner. Involuntarily he stepped back a few paces, and counted the eight upon the other side. As he did so, a sound, indefinite and hardly audible, reached him from the shrubbery beyond the lawn—a sound so faint that it might well have been laid to imagination only, but a sound about which the listener, after a minute's pause, felt no doubt at all.

“A cough,” he said, with lazy sarcasm, “strangled and stifled, but a cough unmistakably ; and, more than that, a man's cough, and still more than that, a cough I've heard before.

Then he sauntered on. The rank grass over which he stepped was heavy with dew, yet often he stopped where it was longest, and stooped to gather a blossom from the wild flowers which overran the neglected lawn. So he passed from the great front entrance round to the south end of the house, turned and loitered past the servants' premises at the back, then turned another corner, and continued his walk—a little more slowly—beside the shuttered windows on the north side. At one, the last in the row, he made a pause, not as if in uncertainty or doubt, but with a settled purpose. First he examined it critically, measuring with his eye its height and width, and its depth from the ground ; then he turned his back upon it, and took in, with a keen, full glance, the scene before it—the stretch of lawn, the bordering of shrubbery beyond, and the crowd of grand old elms towering above it all still farther on. For at least ten long minutes he stood so, his eyes—dark gray eyes, holding the rare beauty of deep, clear thought—earnestly scanning the dusky scene, and an utter stillness and vigilance in the easy attitude.

If any eyes could have been watching from among the over-grown laurels opposite, this was a picture not to be

easily either forgotten or understood—so lonely and so still the scene, so easy, yet so full of purpose this solitary figure. But why should any watchful eyes have been hidden there among the darkening laurel leaves?

The long, thoughtful minutes were spent at last, and the lonely visitor turned to leave Abbotsmoor. One last glance before he entered the avenue, and the scene was photographed on his mind indelibly. The wide, high frontage of the house; the rows of windows heavy with dust and cobwebs, their shutters closely barred, yet cracked in many places; the wide door, scratched and scarred, while a rank, unmanageable branch of ivy had fallen across it, as if to form another heavy bolt; grass growing in the cracks of the stone steps, just as it grew between the embrasures of the windows; wild flowers and garden flowers tangled together among the weeds and grasses; uncut and unnailed creepers perishing helplessly upon the ground, where they seemed struggling to escape the ill-fated house. All the ravages of wind and weather, all the heavy footprints of time and devastation, all the rank fruit of neglect.

"There is a rookery overhead," said the stranger, as he gazed, "and it is impossible but that *sometimes* the sunshine finds its way here, and the birds sing. It was an English home once, and years hence it may be so again, although old Myddelton's heir—"

A sound again, subdued and hushed almost in a moment—yet the keen ear had detected it, and the swift, sportsman-like glance had discovered a figure watching stealthily from among the trees. A few steps on the long, tangled grass, and he was beside this figure, looking down upon it with cool, ironical curiosity.

"Are you here on your own account, or are you sent by your employer?"

The man he addressed did not answer. Perhaps that stifled cough was stopping him; but perhaps that quick gasp of his breath was sudden fear.

"This is the second time I have caught you watching me, and I have a fancy for its being the last. A spy can expect only one treatment, and here it is."

His left hand was fast on the man's collar; with his right he broke a branch above his head, and the next thing

of which the listener was aware was a particular sensation of smarting and stinging in his shoulders, and a general sensation of smarting and stinging throughout his whole system.

Grinding his teeth with rage and shame, he rose from the spot to which he had ignominiously been hurled, and looked after his chastiser with an ugly scowl upon his smooth, sleek face.

"This sort of thing," he muttered between his teeth, "a man never forgets."

An aphorism few would deny at any time, but one which certainly could not be denied by those who boasted the acquaintance of Bickerton Slimp, confidential clerk in the office of Lawrence Haughton, attorney-at-law in the town of Kinbury.

"I shall be even with him yet!"

Such was the magnanimous conclusion arrived at by Mr. Slimp, before he dragged his injured person down the avenue in the wake of his assaulter.

This assaulter had in the meantime reached the gates, and the old lodge-keeper held one of them open for him while he took a crown from his purse.

"Good night," he said then, genially. "Lock the gate after me, so that you may lock in all other marauders."

The old man chuckled as he turned the rusty key.

"There's only myself, sir, to lock in." And the words were true, for Bickerton Slimp's modes of ingress and egress had been nobly independent of lock and bolt, and, though they necessitated a creeping progress unsuited to an upright man, they had their advantage in being known only to himself.



The low, red tavern—over the door of which, through ruth and revelry, the sign of the "Myddelton Arms" had hung for fifty years—felt that evening just a shade of the importance which, according to its own popular legends, belonged to it in the old coaching days. The arrival of a private travelling carriage, with emblazoned panels and white silk lining, was not by any means of daily occurrence, and made the lazy ostler put down his pipe with such impetus that it broke into half-a-dozen pieces. The enter-

tainment of a lady traveller was still less a circumstance of daily occurrence, and made the fidgety hostess nervously and petulantly remark to herself, as she threw her soiled apron behind the door, "Sure as ever there's nothing in the house, somebody's safe to come !"

"You'll be wishing for tea, ma'am," she suggested, coming blandly forward a minute afterwards, to forestall any idea of dinner which might have lurked in the traveller's mind, "a wholesome knife-and-fork tea, as we call it? I've as nice a cold ham as ever was boiled ; and with some eggs—"

"Thank you," the lady answered, passing through the door which the landlady held open, "anything you have. I am sure it will be nice, as you say."

"Only for one, ma'am?"

The fact was self-evident, and the useless piece of enumeration on the part of the landlady only the effect of habit, but she looked surprised when, with the answer, came a vivid blush.

Tea was served in the shadowy, low-ceiled parlour, where a newly-lighted fire struggled into existence, and added considerably to the shadows, but nothing to the light or cheeriness ; when there came the heaviest blow which the landlady of the "Myddelton Arms" had felt for many a day. The cold boiled ham—emphatically the *pièce de résistance* of the inn larder—was gracing that long table in the parlour, and she had displayed there everything edible or ornamental which the inn could furnish forth, when a gentleman arrived, walked coolly into the inn, and ordered—strange to say—tea for one. No need for the landlady to forestall him with the suggestion. Whether or not it was his habit to dine late, the order for tea came promptly enough from his lips to-night.

"He doesn't look hurried or even hungry," thought mine hostess, gazing nervously up into his face ; "will it do to ask him to wait? He looks kind, and a gentleman," was the next nervous thought ; "will it do to tell him how I'm situated?"

At that moment the gentleman smiled—smiled almost as if he understood her.

"Perhaps your room is engaged?"

That made it easy. The landlady's lips were unsealed, and she did tell him exactly—and rather circumstantially—"how she was situated." As he stood listening, leaning against the window of the little bar, he took a crimson leather purse from his pocket, and held it in his hand. Her eyes fell on it as she spoke, and she noticed that it was old and rather shabby, but that it was a peculiar purse, and handsomer than any she had ever seen before.

"If the lady will allow me to join her at tea, it will save trouble, will it?"

So he asked, opening the while one of the pockets of the purse, and drawing a card from it.

"Yes sir, if, as you say, she will."

Mine hostess made this observation rather absently, gazing at the many pockets of the purse, and trying to read the name which was stamped in gold upon the leather inside the flap.

"On second thoughts, I will not send a card; it can make no difference. Say a stranger asks this favour of her."

As he put back the card a sudden quizzical smile came into his eyes.

"What sort of a lady is she?"

"Well, sir," began the landlady, meditatively, "I should say, if I was asked, that she's an invalid. She looks white enough to have just come from a sick-bed, and she's hardly strength and energy to move about; she doesn't look cheerful either. I should say ill in mind and body; that's what I should say, sir, if I was asked."

Perhaps the stranger thought she had been asked, and that he had been answered, for without further words he turned away and walked to and fro within the circumscribed limits of the bar, until mine hostess reappeared with an expression of intense relief on her countenance.

"The lady sends her compliments, sir, and will be very happy if you will join her. I'll take fresh plates and a cup in at once. I'm very glad it's arranged so, as you're in a hurry."

Her mind being thoroughly at ease, and the arrangements propitious, mine hostess could afford to bring out a little of the gracious and accommodating loftiness of the stage-coach period.

The door was hardly closed upon her guest when another customer arrived at the "Myddelton Arms," but this time

the landlady felt no nervousness in the prospect of the entertainment, for the face of Mr. Bickerton Slimp was well known in the tavern bar, and the voice of Mr. Slimp had a familiar, even confidential tone when it addressed mine hostess.

"Well, Mrs. Murray, no need to ask you how you are ; you look as blooming as usual. I've snatched a few minutes to call in, you see. Ah, if your snug hostelry was but a little nearer to Kinbury, what constant visits you would have from yours truly !"

"You aren't looking well, Mr. Slimp," remarked the landlady, gazing critically into his face.

"Oh, yes, yes, quite well," he answered, with a movement of his shoulders which he intended for a gesture of deprecation, but which had the appearance of an experiment to test their muscles, "but tired a little. The old man has kept me very hard at it to-day."

"The old man, indeed !" smiled the listener, with a friendly tap upon the narrow shoulder of Mr. Slimp. "Why, Mr Haughton cannot be more than forty, if he's that. His sister was born the same year as me, that was in '29, and he's younger by two years at the very least. Well, if we were born in '29, and this is '71, aren't we forty-two ? And can you call *him* an old man ?"

"Ladies are never old," smiled the lawyer's clerk insinuatingly ; "but in these degenerate days, Mrs. Murray, our employers get dubbed old men, without reference to the year in which they chanced to be born."

"When you set up for yourself, then, your clerks will be at liberty to speak of you as an old man, though you can scarcely be—let me see—more than Mr. Haughton's age."

This mine hostess said with a sly relish, for Bickerton Slimp affected a youthful air and youthful garments, and few ventured to remind him of his age. Even she could not have done so without that dainty allusion to his "setting up for himself," the centre of the labyrinth in which he plodded ; the bourne to which he fancied craft and cunning were his surest guides.

He smiled again ; he had a bland, stereotyped smile, which he considered a mighty weapon with the fair sex.

"Just so ; and you shall rebuke my clerks as sternly as

you please, on condition that you always smile upon me. Is—dear me, what was I going to say—oh, is the parlour vacant this evening ? ”

Mrs. Murray was a little surprised at the question, and a little surprised that Mr. Slimp still stood on the chilly bricks in the little hall, and did not take his own seat in the bar, and light his pipe. But she was not sorry for an excuse to tell him about those two guests who were drinking tea together now from her best china, and she did so at large. The lawyer's clerk listened smilingly, nor did he attempt to speak himself until the narration was quite over. Then he asked her coaxingly to mix him a glass of whisky punch, and enumerated the different ingredients he required with a cultivated taste which would have done no discredit to a Yankee.

“Just mix it so, Mrs. Murray, if you please ; and do it yourself, to give it its proper flavour. You are quite sure you have Angostura bitters in the house ? ”

Mrs. Murray stepped within the bar and left the lawyer's clerk still standing beside the parlour door. The mixing of the punch, even with all its requisites, would not take more than two minutes, so he had no time to spare. With a loud, demonstrative carelessness, he opened the parlour door and entered the room, stood a moment transfixed with astonishment when he found it occupied, uttered a meek and very elaborate apology to the lady for having assumed the room to be empty, and backed from it with slow—very slow—deference.

“I just opened that door to see what time it was,” he explained, as he entered the bar and took up his glass with a beaming smile upon his face ; “I knew my watch was wrong, but did not know how much. I cannot depend upon your kitchen clock ; but that timepiece upon the parlour chimney I depend upon implicitly, and always did.”

“Were they at tea ? ” inquired the hostess, her curiosity stronger than her pride.

“Not—exact'y.” Mr. Slimp answered the question with unction, but whether this was the effect of the whisky, or of what he had seen, was not evident. “Not—exactly ; they were standing together on the hearth, Mrs. Murray, looking very interesting indeed.”

“Why, they are strangers ! ”

"Ahem! So we are given to understand, *if we choose*."

"But"—Mrs. Murray's very breath was taken away by the covert insinuation—"but you say they were standing together on the rug. Were they talking or shaking hands or anything?"

"Not—exactly," Mr. Slimp answered again, as deliberately as before. "In fact, they were standing there in utter silence, which is the suspicious part of it all. Do you think that if they were strangers to each other they would stand so, without speaking? No, my good friend; they would have been seated at table, and talking amiably."

Mine hostess put on an air of worldly wisdom equal to Mr. Slimp's, and, not to be behindhand in other qualities, remarked, with more vivacity than veracity, that she had "suspected so all along."

The next moment she had left the bar, for the parlour bell had rung, and she always liked—as she expressed it—to answer her own bells.

"It's for the carriage, Mr. Slimp," she whispered, looking in at the bar on her return. "I must go and tell the servants; they are having supper in the kitchen. I left the girl to see to them."

"Wait, Mrs. Murray," called Slimp, in a subdued, eager voice; "I will go round to the yard myself, and order the horses to be put to."

It was almost dark in the yard now, and, though it impeded his examination, it certainly afforded Mr. Slimp the opportunity of conducting it unperceived. The ostler of the "Myddelton Arms" was glad to see Mr. Slimp and to converse with him, but the postilion, when he came briskly out and took his seat, and the gentleman's gentleman who stood quietly by until the horses moved and then followed them to the front door of the inn, exhibited a little more surprise at the effort he made to enter into conversation with them, and discouraged those efforts with cool civility.

The carriage lamps were lighted, the horses fresh and restive. The breath of the near horse actually fanned the cheek of Mr. Slimp when he leaned against the house looking on. The lady for whom the beautiful carriage waited came slowly and timidly from the parlour, while the gentleman, who was indebted to her for his accommodation,

followed her leisurely. It was natural, of course, that he should see her to her carriage. She bade good evening to the landlady, wrapped her cloak tightly about her, drew a soft wool veil down over her face, and took her seat. One of her hands was full of flowers, a curious mixture of wild-flowers and of cultivated blossoms run to seed; the other she offered to the gentleman; and he, standing at the carriage door, took it, and quietly wished her good night. After a moment's pause he went back into the inn parlour. Mrs. Murray had performed her last curtsy, and the horses had made a few steps forward, when he came out again, and spoke up to the servant on the box seat, while the postilion drew in his eager horses.

"Your lady left this purse behind her in the tavern."

The servant stooped with a touch of his hat and took the purse; the gentleman stepped back, and the carriage went on its way. But Mrs. Murray had not regained her breath yet. In her officiousness at something having been left behind, she had gone close up to the lamps, and so she saw that the purse he handed to the lady's servant was the purse she had last seen in his hands when he took his card from it, the worn crimson purse, with the many pockets and the name stamped in gold.

"Don't you think that she seems very nervous and delicate, sir?"

Mine hostess made this inquiry merely out of curiosity for his reply; but felt very little enlightened when that was given.

"I do indeed."

For nearly an hour he stayed at the inn, and for this hour Mr. Slimp's life was a burden to him. The cool, half-quizzical eyes of the man who had thrashed him, seemed following him everywhere, for the sole purpose of making him uncomfortable and ill at ease. Once or twice the embryo attorney became so seriously depressed that he resolved to start at once for Kinbury, but he never carried out the resolution. He had a plan to work out with which a sudden departure might have interfered, and besides that, it might almost have looked like fear—strange and unnatural hypothesis after that scene among the trees at Abbotsmoor!

It was an idle hour which the stranger spent at the roadside tavern, but he did not apparently object to wasting it. Wherever he stood or sat ; to whomsoever he talked ; with whomsoever he laughed ; if he did not laugh or speak at all ; lounging and loitering there with utter indolence, yet with a grace which had no listlessness or supineness—he pursued the luckless clerk with this cool, amused gaze of his. It was never angry ; it was far from insolent ; it was only a gaze of quiet amusement. * But perhaps the contempt which Mr. Slimp read in it was not all born of his imagination only, though certainly the threat he read there was. The handsome, amused eyes held no threat for such a pitiable object as the man who had cringed and fawned under an upraised arm.

CHAPTER II.

A girl who has so many wilful ways,
 She would have caused Job's patience to forsake him,
 Yet is so rich in all that's girlhood's praise,
 Did Job himself upon her goodness gaze,
 A little better she would surely make him.

THE "Myddelton Arms" stood on the highway about a mile and a half from Kinbury, and at about the same distance on the other side the town, lay the small estate of Deergrove, sheltered at the back by the grove which originally gave it its name, and against which the walls of the house stood out with dazzling whiteness, but unsheltered in the front, where its windows glistened in the noonday sun, unbroken and unrelieved by any waving leaf or blossom, and where the flower-beds, so perfect in their outline, stared thirstily up in the summer days, and watched for the cool, coy shadows of the passing clouds.

"But it does not signify much," as one of Mrs. Trent's visitors said to herself, walking slowly up the smooth and well-kept lawn ; "they grow no flowers here but those that love the glare."

The summer had passed its middle age, yet the round beds were gay in their scarlet and yellow robes. It was still quite warm and pleasant in the dusk of the September

evening, so the young girl sauntered slowly up the drive, thinking how beautiful it would be in the grove behind the house, where the twilight was so dim and silent.

Within the house a man-servant had shut the daylight from one room, and was lighting it—as he had been skilfully trained to do—to show off at their best the snow-white damask, the glittering plate, and, above all, the faces and figures of the ladies of the house. In the drawing-room on the opposite side of the small paved hall the daylight was still allowed to linger.

A moderate-sized and modernly furnished drawing-room, suggestive of ample means, and luxurious taste, but with one vague, inexplicable want. This deficiency might not have been felt by many of those who met here, but to those who recognised it at all, it was evident in everything the handsome room contained, or rather it was so ever-present there that it made itself felt in spite of all those attributes of ease and luxury, or of art and literature, which this drawing-room at Deergrove held. It peeped from the glistening blue curtains, and lay on the deep white rug. It nestled among the silken cushions, and lingered about the laden tables. It stared back from the vivid, well-framed pictures on the walls, and echoed even from the gleaming keys of Mr. grand piano.

It was only one of the four occupants of the room who, that evening, was conscious of this vague sense of something wanting. If it had been possible for the others to feel it, the void could not have existed.

A group of four, sitting at ease, with very little of the air of expectancy usual to the waiting minutes before dinner. The hostess reclined in a wide easy-chair beside one of the bay windows. She was a large, languid woman, elegantly dressed, but possessing in her handsome face that great want which all her house held. She had three claims to individuality, and three only—a fine figure, a great ambition, and an overweening pride in her only child. And Mrs. Trent was performing her own peculiar mission as she sat smiling upon her daughter and her guests, and bringing in, at every opportunity, dainty allusions to her titled acquaintances. In the corner of a small couch near her, reclined her daughter Theodora, leaning forward gracefully from the

cushions, while her long skirts of green satin lay in rich folds upon the white rug. Her hair, of pale brown, was dressed high upon her head, as was the fashion of that year, and a butterfly of gold and emeralds shone with almost dazzling lustre among the plaits above her temple. Her features were clearly cut and regular, like her mother's; and her eyes were of the same light blue; but her lips were still more haughty in their curves, and even a little colder in their rest. A handsome woman undeniably was Theodora Trent, yet in her faultless features that guest, to whom her face is turned so often, sees that one vague deficiency which is about him always in this house.

Upon the rug, with his elbow on the chimney-piece, and the fingers of one hand toying with his silky, pale moustache and whiskers, lounged Captain Hervey Trent, nephew of his hostess, and the husband selected for her only daughter—not simply because he was so sure to inherit old Myddelton's money, but because he was in every way suitable for a son-in-law. Handsome and elegant, he graced society, and would add to her daughter's popularity; easy and indolent, he would not be likely to rebel against the will of a mother-in-law.

Decidedly Captain Trent was a handsome man. There never was heard a dissentient voice when the fact was asserted, while no one was more thoroughly aware of its truth than Captain Hervey Trent himself. He was twenty-five—his cousin Theodora's age exactly—and boasted the regular features and blue eyes which characterised the Trents: he stood five feet ten in his boots, and measured the approved number of inches across the shoulders, and, beyond all this, he possessed equally the power, and the time, and the inclination to dress to the very perfection of what he termed "good form." He was a man with a musical, passionless voice, and white, listless hands; able to bear with no unhandsome grace the burden of himself and the boredom which surrounded him; and to go through life as a gentleman should who rightly understands the exigencies of "good form;" and can utterly ignore so vulgar an abstract idea as emotion.

A great contrast to her nephew, was the one guest whom Mrs. Trent entertained this evening—so great a contrast to

them all, indeed, that not for years were they to comprehend the unreachèd heights and unsounded depths of a nature such as his. Nineteen women out of twenty would unhesitatingly have pronounced Captain Hervey Trent the handsomer man of the two; not one woman out of twenty could have lavished on Hervey Trent one tithe of the thought, and curiosity, and admiration which were won from them—sometimes even against their will—by Royden Keith.

We have seen him before in the evening dusk at Abbotsmoor. Theodora Trent had seen him before, but his face was still a riddle to her, as it had been from the first, and as it was still to be. It was a grave face when at rest, with its strange mixture of power and patience—a face full of deep and concentrated thought, but with never a shade of gloom upon it, or trivial fretfulness; a face that could be only brave, and fearless, whether shadowed by that depth of thought, or brightened by the rare smile which Theodora tried to provoke. Its skin was so browned by the sun, the moustache and the short hair were so thick and dark, the lashes so long, and the teeth so white, that many took Royden Keith for a native of Southern Spain or Italy. But that idea vanished after the first few minutes, and most especially when he spoke. Though puzzled a little now and then by the trace of foreign travel, no one could help being struck by what was essentially English in him; the straightforward glance of his eyes, clear-judging and far-seeing, and the voice, which, whether ringing to anger, falling to quiet irony, or softening to pathos, was, despite an accent or an idiom, picked up unconsciously in foreign lands, most thoroughly English.

He was sitting opposite Miss Trent, his elbow on a table near the couch on which she sat. She looked from him up to Captain Trent, and down to him again. Even her unobservant eyes were puzzled by the difference in the attitudes of the two young men; and she turned for the last time from her cousin's leaning form, and the slow motion of his hands, to the tall, well-knit figure, which, though full of strength and activity, was yet capable of an ease and stillness almost remarkable.

"And can you really mean, Mr. Keith," she said, dropping her fingers on a cabinet portrait of herself which lay

upon the table beside her, "that you have never been photographed before."

"Why, 'before'?" asked Royden, extending his hand for the picture.

"After all, I am rather glad," she mused smilingly, "because now your first photograph will be taken with us."

"How will that happen, Miss Trent?"

"I will tell you," she answered, watching his face as he examined the portrait. "On the day of our pic-nic at Abbotsmoor, a little French photographer, who lives in Statton, is to be there with his camera, and take us all, with the old mansion for a background. Now you see why I am glad that will be your first portrait."

"Hardly." Mr. Keith said this quietly, as he bent over the picture, and Theodora looked in vain for a smile.

"Interesting scene," remarked Captain Hervey, raising his blue eyes slowly from the rug; "Lady Lawrence requires the picture, I believe; at any rate, she has proposed it through her lawyer. The *dramatis personæ* are to be old Myddelton's relations, and the scene his ruinous estate. An elegant group and cheerful surroundings—eh, Mr. Keith?"

"I do not know all old Mr. Myddelton's relations."

"You know the chief of them, Mr. Keith," Theodora answered, unconscious of the vanity of her words, and of the smile which accompanied them, "and you shall see them all on Thursday at Abbotsmoor. You will not be too proud to be photographed among them, will you?"

"Without being one of the family, ought I to be included in the picture?"

There was an intonation that baffled Theodora, and she looked up uneasily.

"Certainly; I shall insist."

She said this with her sweetest smile, and a certain manner which many young ladies of the present age affect—a gracious condescension and self-assertion which in the last century it would have taken a middle-aged matron of the highest society to make bearable, but which now is chosen and assumed by many who, while they speak with open contempt of their fast or unformed sisters, fail to see where they themselves have overstepped the lily-bordered path of truth and simple girlhood.

"One other member of old Myddelton's family you will see here to-night, Mr. Keith," remarked Mrs. Trent, in a tone which seemed to entreat his leniency for the person of whom she spoke ; "she is a niece of mine, and cousin of my daughter's, though she belongs to quite the other side of the house"—on that "quite" Mrs. Trent laid a deliberate emphasis. "We like to ask her here occasionally to show her a little society. She is a grown-up girl now, and not unrepresentable ; so I do all I can for her, and allow her as close an intercourse with my daughter as my daughter chooses to admit."

"Poor little Honor," added "my daughter," with a laugh of particular complaisance. "She is a thorough Craven, as was——"

"A thorough coward?" Royden asked, when she so abruptly paused.

"Oh, Mr. Keith," laughed Theodora, pleasantly, "you know what I mean. At least, you do not know, of course. Why should you be expected to know anything about old Myddelton's family? But this is how it is. Old Mr. Myddelton, you must understand, had one brother and one sister, both a good deal younger than himself. The brother married a Miss Craven—quite a portionless girl—and the sister married very well. She did not agree with her brother as a young girl, and went out with a friend to India, where she married Sir Hervey Lawrence, a very rich old Baronet of an excellent family. This marriage pleased her brother immensely."

"Had neither brother nor sister any children?"

"The only child of old Mr. Myddelton's brother," put in Mrs. Trent, considering, perhaps, that her daughter's genealogical powers had been taxed to the utmost, "was the miserable and abandoned Gabriel, of whom, of course, you have heard and read ; we will put him out of the conversation at once, if you please. There was no other child, and Lady Lawrence had none at all, so the remaining relations, or rather connexions, are the only children of Sir Hervey Lawrence's brother and sister, and Miss Craven's brother and sister."

"The brother and sister of Miss Myddelton's husband, and the brother and sister of Mr. Myddelton's wife ;

do I understand that aright?" inquired her guest, quietly.

"Yes, that is it exactly," put in Miss Trent, hastening to take the conversation upon herself again. "Now see how plainly I will describe them to you. Sir Hervey's sister had two sons—my father, and Hervey's father—and his brother had one daughter, Mrs. Haughton, of The Larches, near here. She and her husband died years ago, but the son, Mr. Haughton, is a solicitor in Kinbury, and Miss Haughton keeps his house. Well, then, on the other side"—Miss Trent illustrated her narrative by the action of her jewelled fingers, and Mr. Keith seemed readily to follow her—"Miss Craven's brother and sister had each an only daughter. The brother's daughter is to be here to-night; and the sister's daughter is Phœbe Owen, a silly girl, who tries one's patience more than Honor does."

"Then, except yourself, Miss Trent, all the relations of Mr. Myddelton are orphans—or rather, I should say, as Mrs. Trent did, the connexions, for I fail to trace one single tie of real relationship?"

"Yes, all orphans; but how funny it is," laughed Theodora, "to speak of Mr. and Miss Haughton as orphans! Why, he is almost a middle-aged man, and she is older. He is the guardian of Honor and Phœbe, who have lived at The Larches ever since they left school."

"Mr. Haughton is a very clever lawyer," interposed Mrs. Trent, languidly: "but we do not visit, save just occasionally to keep up appearances. They move in a different circle from ours."

"I don't believe they move at all, mamma," smiled Theodora; "they stagnate, I think; and Jane Haughton looks like a curiosity when she goes out anywhere."

"After all that rigmarole, Mr. Keith," remarked Captain Hervey, from his position on the rug, "do you feel ambitious of being one of the group to be photographed in front of Abbotsmoor for Lady Lawrence's benefit?—for the picture is to be sent to her ladyship as a delicate attention from her heirs."

"A rather incongruous addition to the family group," smiled Mr. Keith.

"But I am bent upon having you among us," insisted Miss Trent. And, when she appealed to her mother, Mrs.

Trent smiled assentingly, though even *she* could see how silly and inconsiderate was the request.

"Theo," remarked Captain Trent, breaking in upon the silence which followed her speech, "it is five minutes to seven. You should speak to Honor Craven about being in good time."

"I did, Hervey, and she says you told her that it was not *comme il faut* to be too early anywhere."

"I think the child is anxious to learn, Hervey," remarked his aunt, placidly, "and you are helping her to lose her *gaucherie*."

Reading Captain Trent's handsome, lazy smile, a suspicion crossed Royden's mind.

"But I will judge for myself," he thought; and just at that moment the drawing-room door was opened to admit the girl who had been so long sauntering from The Larches to Deergrove.

"Miss Craven."

Theodora rose to meet her cousin, but with such a very slow grace that the girl had come among them all before her hand was taken.

Royden looked up to see this "child" whom Captain Hervey was graciously instructing, and rose, prepared for his introduction. From that moment until he took his place opposite her at the dinner-table, he did not think of sitting again.

For the few minutes before the butler announced dinner she chatted with no appearance of even seeing how her two cousins held themselves aloof from her, and with no *mauvaise honte* in the frank occasional glance she gave to Royden Keith. In vain he looked for the *gaucherie*; in vain he looked for a glimpse of the anxiety for Captain Hervey's instruction; he only saw a young and beautiful girl whose manners had a free and natural grace which was as far removed from Theodora's languidelegance as is the flight of a swallow in the air from the gliding of a swan upon the water.

With curious intentness he watched her through those waiting minutes, and the study seemed a fresh one to this man who had travelled over half the world, and studied the beauty of so many races; and who, though little more than thirty years of age, had lived a wider, larger life than most of the gray-haired men he met

Honor Craven rose when the servant announced the dinner for which Captain Trent had been anxiously waiting ; and for the few moments that she stood there in the daylight Royden's eyes were fixed upon her. She was a girl of apparently eighteen or nineteen years of age, slight and tall, with a figure rounded to the perfection of womanhood, yet possessing the supple grace and freedom of a child. Her dimpled arms and neck shone with a smooth and silky whiteness through her transparent dress. Her hair—rich, soft hair, of bright chestnut brown—was twisted into a coil high upon her head ; and, though no one could see how the ends fell naturally into loose rich curls—as they do when Honor lets it down at night—still everyone could see the soft, natural wave, where it lay across her forehead, and was brushed from her smooth white temples. Her eyes were gray, long, and beautifully shaped, ready in an instant to brighten to a sunny smile, and ready in an instant, too, to darken to a grave and tender sympathy. Her nose was small and straight ; and her white and even teeth would have given beauty to any smile, even without the flash of the brilliant eyes.

All this he saw, yet he could not even have attempted a description of Honor Craven's face, because its rare and matchless beauty was a beauty not of form and tint alone.

" Hervey, I must entrust both the young ladies to you."

Mrs. Trent said this with a wave of the hand in Honor's direction, intended as a gracious encouragement for the girl to come forward and share with Theodora the ineffable advantage of Captain Hervey's support across the hall. Then the hostess laid her plump hand on Royden's sleeve, and, under his silent escort, followed the young people as near as the length of Theodora's train would allow. The few remarks she made were bland and comfortable ones, yet was she all the time keenly aware of a little scene enacted before her ; and the sight brought a smile of satisfaction to her lips, and a thought which was compassionately pleasant.

" Poor child, she always feels *de trop* with Hervey and Theodora."

Mr. Keith, too, had been watching the three figures in front ; and though no smile stirred his lips, there was a glance of keen amusement in his eyes, for Honor had

refused Captain Trent's arm, and was walking in her own way to the dining-room, with a pretty, quiet nonchalance which she did not attempt to hide or disguise. There were two feet at least of space between Captain Hervey's unoccupied arm and the small gloved hand of the girl; and the watcher behind would fain have seen whether Captain Trent comprehended this behaviour in the pupil who was so eager to be initiated by him into the mysteries of "good form," and who knew nothing of "society," save what he kindly exhibited before her; but the back of Captain Trent's fair head alone was visible, and that, at all events, was unruffled.

"My nephew offered you his arm, Honor," remarked Mrs. Trent, as she motioned the girl to the solitary seat on her left hand; "you should have taken it, my dear."

"Should I?" questioned Honor. "You will be tired presently of telling me what I should do or leave undone; won't you, Mrs. Trent?"

"Not if you try to learn," was the benignant reply. "Theodora and I will be patient with you to the end, and Captain Hervey is really anxious to see you study appearances. His eye, of course, is offended by awkwardness, but otherwise he is, I'm sure, pleased to see you always."

"Hervey," the girl said, turning her eyes fully upon her cousin, as he took his seat at the foot of the table, "when shall I cease to offend your eye, so that that delightful time may come when you will be pleased to see me always?"

"I am pleased to see you now," remarked Hervey, with lazy patronage; "I was saying to Theo, only this morning, that your manners were very much improved."

"At least," observed Miss Trent, indifferently, "you said they were a pleasant contrast to Phœbe's."

"Only this morning," echoed Honor, with wilful misconception; "I'm glad you *only* said it that once. Unfortunately, you have not taken so much trouble with Phœbe as you have with me," she added, stooping to inhale the fragrance of the flowers beside her plate; "you must make allowance for us both, but especially for her."

"Phœbe Owen, Mr. Keith," said Miss Trent, turning to Royden, who sat beside her, "is the only one of Mr. Myddelton's relations whom you do not know now."

"Except——"

It was Honor who began the sentence, and stopped, blushing vividly, even painfully.

"Except?" Mr. Keith echoed, interrogatively.

"Honor, what pleasure can you find in dragging up forbidden subjects?" inquired Mrs. Trent; and Honor understood the hidden anger in the smooth, soft tones.

Hervey looked down upon his soup plate and Theodora attempted to quench her cousin with a glance and a curl of her lips; but Mr. Keith waited for his answer.

"I was going to say," Honor remarked, looking fully into its questioning eyes, while the bright pink faded slowly to its own delicate hue again, "except my own cousin, Gabriel Myddelton. I forgot that his name was never mentioned here. And I—I don't know why I should have spoken of him to-night. At home he is talked of only with horror and contempt. When I mention him, even myself, it is simply in utter bewilderment."

"Why?"

For a moment she read his face with a frank, gentle gaze, and then she dropped her eyes again, and answered very quietly—

"I can see that you know why."

"Please don't bring up that horrible and detestable story again," exclaimed Theodora, with a well-feigned shudder; "we are not hardened to it by hearing it perpetually, as Honor says she does at home."

"No, Mr. Myddelton's murder is not quite a perpetual topic of conversation even at The Larches, Theodora," said Honor, speaking fearlessly, though her beautiful eyes had a great wistfulness in them.

"Mr. Keith," remarked Miss Trent, to change effectually the subject of conversation, "what a splendid horse you were riding to-day, and how tired he was! From where had you ridden?"

"From home."

Theodora glanced up with a start. One word or look of encouragement from him, and she could ask the question to which she longed to hear the answer, "Where is your home?" But there came no word or smile of encouragement, however slight, and she was fain to content herself

with having achieved her primary object, and turned her guest's attention from a name which she would have given much to be able to expunge from the family tree.

Yet, had Theodora quite succeeded, after all? She had shown her hatred of the subject; Mrs. Trent had skilfully withdrawn from it; Hervey had languidly ignored it; Honor Craven had blushed with a keen sense of pain or shame at mentioning it; yet no sooner had the servants left the room than this dreaded topic was uppermost once more, and even being handled by each one of the little group with an apparent indifference. Was it because Gabriel Myddelton was now spoken of only as old Myddelton's nephew, and not as a friend or relation of any one present? Or was it because there was one strong will present, which, without evidence of its power, could lead where it chose, and chose thus?

"If I am really to go with you to Abbotsmoor," Royden said, "I must first hear the entire story of old Myddelton's murder, or what interest will there be for me in the place? Miss Trent, will you tell it?"

"I suppose I must, if you ask me," she answered smiling; "but it is a very horrible story to tell, and I am not sure that I shall be able to get through it. Honor, you look as if you were prepared to interrupt me in every sentence. Eat your grapes, please. Must I really tell it all, Mr. Keith?" and again she looked up, smilingly, into the handsome dark face.

"If you will—unless your cousin will help you."

He did not mention which cousin, but Honor very suddenly began to attend to her grapes.

CHAPTER III.

He alone whose hand is bounding
Human power and human will,
Looking through each soul's surrounding,
Knows its good or ill. WHITTIER.

"I **KNOW**, Mr. Keith, that you have not been in this part of the country very long," Miss Trent began; "but still you must have heard of old Mr. Myddelton. You must

have heard how he saved and accumulated his wealth until the very mention of old Myddelton's money became a proverb conveying an idea of unlimited riches."

"Our uncle's existence was one long course of amassing and hoarding," remarked Honor, speaking almost absently, while her clear, listening gaze was fixed upon Theodora's face, "and I think the people about Abbotsmoor are quite right when they whisper that wealth—acquired and used *so*—must bring the very reverse of a blessing to its possessor."

"Its probable possessors do not happen to think so," put in Captain Trent, lightly.

"They know, of course," added Royden Keith, as he raised his wine-glass slowly to his lips, "that it depends upon themselves, and upon their use of the wealth."

"You really want to hear the story of Mr. Myddelton's murder, do you, Mr. Keith?" inquired Miss Trent, as she deliberately peeled the peach which she could not stop to taste; leaning forward a little, so that when she turned to Royden she could see the expression of his listening face. "I wish you had seen Abbotsmoor before I told you. We shall be there on Thursday, and I will show you the window through which the murderer forced his way."

"I have seen Abbotsmoor; I know the window," remarked Royden, calmly.

Miss Trent looked round, surprised.

"Oh, I did not know," she said, vexed it would seem. "Then Lady Somerson, I suppose, anticipated our pic-nic? That was very unkind of her, because I told her of it two weeks ago."

"No, I went alone," said Royden, in his cool grave tones. "One evening, as I passed the lodge, I was tempted in to see the gloomy old place."

"You will not think it a gloomy place on Thursday," observed Theodora, with her most charming smile. "But I must get on with my story, or you and Hervey and mamma will be bored to death."

For, an instant Royden glanced across at Honor, as if wondering why she should not be bored too. The girl's look of eager, yet sorrowful interest was answer enough.

"I told you, didn't I, that old Myddelton's brother had one only son—Gabriel? He was educated for no profession, because, of course, he was known to be his uncle's heir. After his parents died—they died when he was quite a child—he lived entirely at Abbotsmoor. His uncle did not send him to college; and he wasn't very well educated, was he, mamma?"

"As I remember him," remarked Mrs. Trent, indifferently, "he was a quiet, gentlemanly young man, amiable, and easily led, but with a pernicious habit of arguing certain matters with his uncle. At that time I never imagined what awful passions lay beneath this quiet demeanour; still I always, even then, considered him inexcusably ungrateful for what was done for him, of a moody nature, and sadly deficient in refinement of taste. He could not bear the restraint of a regular life at Abbotsmoor; indeed he made no secret of the fact that the order and punctuality of his uncle's house were irksome to him."

"But order and punctuality were not all, Mrs. Trent," put in Honor, speaking with quiet earnestness. "I have often heard that life at Abbotsmoor was utterly sordid and utterly solitary."

"And Gabriel Myddelton," remarked Royden, refilling Theodora's glass with great leisureliness, without one glance into Honor's face, "was perhaps by nature neither utterly sordid nor utterly solitary."

"He proved himself both to no mean extent," returned Captain Trent.

"He proved himself," added Theodora, with a slow elevation of her eyebrows, a hundred thousand times worse than that; and it is no wonder—is it, Mr. Keith?—that we are all ashamed of even belonging to the family of Gabriel Myddelton."

"Miss Craven, I believe," said Royden, "is the only one at all allied to him. How does she bear the heavy yoke of such a connection?"

As he gazed into Honor's face, he saw her cheeks burn; and knowing the colour must be born either of a great pain or a great shame, he turned the question aside.

"Now, Miss Trent, what a long time we hover on the verge of that murder!"

"Honor, do not interrupt me again," said Theodora, once more taking up the thread which it pleased her to fancy that Honor had broken. "Well, Mr. Keith, once Gabriel and old Mr. Myddelton had a quarrel, and it ended in Gabriel's either being turned out of the house, or voluntarily leaving it. A message was sent at once to summon Mr. Myddelton's lawyer—the firm in Kinbury was Carter and Haughton in those days: now Mr. Haughton (I told you he was one of old Myddelton's relations and Honor's guardian) has the whole business. Well, Mr. Carter came, and Mr. Myddelton made his will, leaving his property, as I told you, to his sister, Lady Lawrence, to be by her bequeathed among his connections. The lawyer was at Abbotsmoor nearly all day, and when he left the house at last, he met Gabriel returning to it. They stopped a little time talking, and Mr. Carter, being a silly, chatty old gentleman, told Gabriel of the will he had just left in his client's secrétaire, and which would leave him penniless instead of a millionaire; adding a word of advice to him to try to regain his old position before it was too late.

Then they separated. That night—oh, this is a dreadful story to tell!" cried Theodora, interrupting herself with a clasp of her white hands. "I wish you had not asked me, Mr. Keith."

"Perhaps some one else will finish the story for you," he suggested.

But Theodora had no real desire for another to take her place as long as she could win—even by this story from which she pretended to shrink—a claim on his undivided attention.

"No, I will go on, as you wish it," she said, acceding gracefully. "Next morning old Mr. Myddelton was found murdered in the wood beyond the shrubbery; the window of his room had been forced open, the lock of the secrétaire wrenched, and the will was gone; and, more than that, upon the carpet lay Mr. Myddelton's candlestick and the velvet cap he always wore in the house, and on both there were stains of blood."

"Judging by those premises," remarked Royden, "Mr. Myddelton had been struck within the room by the thief who had stolen the will; he had followed the thief across

the lawn and through the shrubbery to the wood. Here there must have been another struggle, which ended in the old man's death. Was that the general supposition?"

"It was exactly so," returned Hervey, "and proved, of course, to have been Gabriel Myddelton's act."

"It was easy to prove that," put in Mrs. Trent, with languid contempt. "Gabriel was caught in an attempt to leave England; and, in the bag he carried were found fragments of the missing will. Of course there could not be a doubt after that, but, even if there had been, it was dispelled upon the trial."

"Whose evidence in Court could go beyond that forcible fact of the destroyed will being found in his possession, and his being caught endeavouring to escape?"

"But, Mr. Keith, there *was* even further evidence, and that doomed him at once," replied Theodora. "The counsel for the prosecution brought forward a girl named Margaret Territ, who lived with her father in a cottage on the outer border of the wood, and she had terrible evidence to give, though she had with much trouble been prevailed upon to give it. On that evening of the murder, she said, Gabriel Myddelton had gone to their cottage and told them of his quarrel with his uncle. He had told them of old Mr. Myddelton's having made a will to disinherit him, and even where it was put. Her father could prove this, the girl added, for he had been present, and had waited to cheer young Mr. Myddelton a bit before he went away to the mines, where he was on night-work. At night, when she was sitting alone in the cottage, Gabriel came again, very quietly and cautiously, she said, his face white and scared, as she could see even by the firelight, for he would not let her light a candle. He asked for water to wash his hands, and when he had washed them he opened the back-door of the cottage and threw the water on the soil; then he drew off his white wristbands, crushed them up in his hand, and burnt them to ashes in the fire; and then he borrowed from her an old coat of her father's. The poor girl seems to have unquestioningly done all the wicked fellow asked her: and she had even promised to hide or destroy the coat he left behind him. But I suppose her father's sense of justice came to her aid, and prevented her fulfilling her promise. The coat

was shown on the trial, and there, on one shoulder and on one wrist, were stains of blood again."

"Stronger evidence never was brought against a prisoner. Of course they hanged him?"

"He was convicted, certainly," replied Theodora, "but he escaped."

A little silence fell upon the group, and then again Royden's voice coolly and easily broke the stillness.

"How about the will, Miss Trent?"

"Fortunately," explained Theodora, with as much emphasis as her constitutional languor would permit, "Mr. Carter had a duplicate of the will, so that it did not signify about that copy having been destroyed by his client's nephew."

"If Mr. Carter had told Gabriel that," exclaimed Honor, involuntarily, "nothing need have happened."

"Or rather," added Hervey, "the old lawyer might have been murdered too."

"Exactly," assented Royden, with a nod of prompt acquiescence. "How did Myddelton manage the escape from gaol?"

"Oh, pray do not begin another long story about that wicked young man, Theodora," cried Mrs. Trent, smiling graciously upon her guest. "You are wearying Mr. Keith. What interest can he take in such an amount of crime and craft?"

"It does interest me, Mrs. Trent," her guest answered, with grave courtesy; "I—have been a barrister, and such things still interest me keenly."

"Have been a barrister!" echoed Theodora, wonderingly, and not too politely. "How strange that seems! I only mean," she added in graceful confusion, "that you seem so young to talk of what you *have been*—in a profession, too, where a man must bring the experience of years to follow it successfully; besides——"

But Theodora stopped there; she could not add aloud the wonder how he had travelled so much, and was so rich and idle now, if his profession had *only* been that of a barrister.

"If you have been a barrister, Mr. Keith," said Hervey, gazing curiously at him, "I wonder you are not *au fait* in this story of young Myddelton's trial and escape."

"I have heard of it, but no one ever gave me the

particulars exactly as you have done. I did not read a word of it in the papers at the time."

"That was odd."

"Very odd," assented Royden, lazily; "besides which, another thing strikes me as odd. You said that Gabriel Myddelton was weak and cowardly; if so, how did he manage his escape after conviction? Such a thing would, I should imagine, require skill and courage."

"I think," said Theodora, hastily putting in a reply, "that when you hear the particulars of his escape you will see that it was chiefly managed for him—he had but little need of skill and courage himself."

"But who would care to run such risks for a condemned criminal?"

"I think you will see when I tell you the story," replied Miss Trent; "but you must wait for that until we are at Abbotsmoor on Thursday. Mamma will not object then; will you, mamma dear?"

"Even I have never heard the whole story of Gabriel's escape," said Honor, breaking her attentive silence; "but of course it was Margaret Territ, or her father, who planned it and helped him."

"You were but a little child when the murder was committed," observed Royden; "you do not, I suppose, remember Gabriel Myddelton?"

"No, it was ten years ago, and I was only eight; but I've seen his picture at Abbotsmoor."

"A weak face, had he?"

"I can hardly say. It is very boyish, I think, and delicate."

"It does not remind you of the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's?"

"Oh, no!" she answered. Then her pretty laugh broke off suddenly, and her eyes darkened with an anxious wistfulness. "Mr. Keith, do *you* feel sure that my cousin Gabriel was guilty of that theft and murder?"

She could not help her eyes betraying her longing that he should contradict this fact—which no one had ever yet doubted; nor could he help that one bound which his heart gave when he saw how she waited for his answer.

"There seems no room for doubt," he said. "The flight

and escape are both terrible stumbling-blocks to any belief in Gabriel Myddelton's innocence."

"Oh, no!" she interrupted eagerly, though her tone was very low. "You forget, Mr. Keith, that the escape was *after* conviction. It was too late for any innocence to save him then, even if——"

"Even if he had been innocent—yes," returned Royden; "but I see no loophole for escape from such a verdict as the jury brought."

"And you think he was guilty?"

There gathered a strange, warm light in Royden's eyes as he answered her with quiet earnestness—

"You must let me answer this question on some future day. I have not even heard the whole history yet."

"You shall hear it at Abbotsmoor on Thursday," put in Theodora, graciously, "and then you will see—as I told you—all old Middelton's connections together—of course excepting Gabriel."

"Of course excepting Gabriel," assented Royden. "And about the property? It, I suppose, went as it was willed—and Lady Lawrence holds the power of dividing it among you, or bequeathing it to one alone?"

"Yes, it rests with her entirely; and at Christmas she is coming over to make the acquaintance of all the family, preparatory to making her will. We receive these messages through her solicitors in London, for she herself never writes to any of us."

"She is a widow, I presume?"

"Yes, and has been a widow for many years, with no family of her own."

"A good thing for us," put in Captain Hervey, placidly: "for you must own there are plenty of us to choose from."

"And both her possible heirs," added Theodora, with a little quiet malice, "are named after her husband or herself. Old Sir Hervey Lawrence belonged to this neighbourhood, you see; and so we have Hervey Myddelton Trent here, and Lawrence Myddelton Haughton at The Larches."

"And all we girls have Myddelton for a second name," put in Honor, laughing.

"Strange of Lady Lawrence to wait so long before she comes to visit her family or her native place."

"She never liked Abbotsmoor," Mrs. Trent replied. "I believe she never liked England ; and I'm sure she did not care for her brother."

"Suppose she never comes, but leaves her money to Indian charities?" said Honor.

"She dare not," retorted Theodora, quickly. "She is bound to leave it as Mr. Myddelton arranged, either to one of us, or to some of us, or to all of us."

"Who is the most likely to inherit it?" questioned Royden, coolly.

"I should certainly never dream of the other side the house——"

"Do not hesitate to say it, Hervey," observed Honor, in his pause. "You mean that she will never acknowledge the Cravens. I don't think she will, Mr. Keith. Mr. Myddelton was very angry with his brother for marrying my aunt. The Cravens were poor, and always had been poor ; and—it is to be surmised—they always will be poor."

"You are evidently grieving for that."

"Yes," she answered, with no shade of grief in her eyes. "I should love to be rich—I think."

"Strange thing," mused Royden, "that the old Squire should at last shuffle off the responsibility of his wealth upon his sister. Has she been using the money since his death?"

"No ; it has been accumulating, luckily for us," replied Hervey ; "indeed, it was accumulating for years before his death. Old Myddelton's money is more than a million in hard cash now, independent of the landed property."

"Lady Lawrence may very well divide such wealth as that."

"Yes, of course she may, Mr. Keith," assented his hostess, languidly ; "but still I fancy she will choose an heir, and that will naturally be Hervey."

"But Mr. Haughton is as nearly related to her, is he not?"

"Oh, she will not think of him," interposed Captain Trent, superciliously ; "he is a regular snob, settled down into a pettifogging country lawyer, and almost as mean as was old Myddelton himself."

"Suppose you were to recollect the fact that he's my guardian, Hervey," observed Honor, quietly.

"That would make no difference," returned Captain Trent, laughing. "You know very well how little *you* think of him."

A vivid, painful blush rose to the girl's cheeks, and even Royden could see that she had not the power of contradicting that last statement.

"Perhaps," he said, "Lady Lawrence may choose an heiress in preference to an heir. She might very naturally wish for a young relation to live with her, as she has no daughters of her own."

"So I often say," spoke Mrs. Trent, blandly; "and it pleases me to think how admirably my daughter is fitted for the post."

"More than the others?"

Theodora turned to Mr. Keith in blank astonishment when he uttered that cool question; but the sight of his handsome, careless face disarmed her quick suspicion.

"As for the others," she said, with a deprecatory gesture of her hands, "Jane Haughton would grind and save like an exaggerated female copy of old Myddelton himself, and Phoebe would spend all the money on her person."

"It is a small person to spend a million on," observed Honor, with a quick flash in her eyes, half of anger, half of amusement.

"And"—questioned Royden, his own eyes full of laughter.

"The only other niece is Honor," said Theodora, hurrying over the words, "and I'm sure she would not have an idea what to do with the money; should you, Honor?"

"Yes. I would live all alone in a splendid house, where no one should order me about."

"What a childish idea!" said Theodora, with a curl of her lip.

"And I would do good to others, for I could afford to pay for a master in deportment, and so relieve Hervey from his most onerous duty."

"You are right. Such wealth should have some such noble end in view," said Royden, with a laugh of quiet irony. "Gold is, as we all know, 'Heaven's physis, Life's restorative,' but we also know that there are other virtues it can possess."

"There is one evil it cannot cure," observed Honor, puzzling a little over his tone, but answering it merrily, "and that is our family failing—avarice. I often think how

readily Lady Lawrence will recognise us all as Myddeltons, when she sees us crowding eagerly about her, and paying court to the riches which she holds in bond for some of us."

" 'All the women of Blois are freckled and ill-tempered,' " quoted Royden, rising as Mrs. Trent rose.

Honor paused where she stood, and forgot every practical answer to Captain Hervey's catechism on the exigencies of society.

"How do you mean, Mr. Keith?"

He smiled into the innocent, questioning eyes, and answered her, while Mrs. Trent and Theodora swept ominously past.

"A lazy traveller in Blois, who found his landlady freckled and ill-tempered, wrote his experience so—'All the women of Blois are freckled and ill-tempered.' "

"I hope, Honor," remarked Mrs. Trent, as the girl entered the drawing-room, "that you may some day grow to understand what is required of you when you are the least important person in company. I despair of ever teaching you."

"Suppose I learn that thoroughly, and then find I am not always the least important person in company," said Honor, with a mischievous glance from under her lashes. "I shall have all to unlearn, and a fresh lesson to begin. Oh, dear me! how pleasant it would be if one need only act on instinct!"

"If I were a girl like you, Honor," put in Theodora, with an exaggerated expression of despair, and perhaps not very strict adherence to truth, "I should feel very grateful to those who tried to train me."

"Under those circumstances it might almost be a good thing if you were me," was Honor's dry and ungrammatical rejoinder, as she took as comfortable a seat as Mrs. Trent and Theodora allowed her, and settled herself to gain as much enjoyment as possible from the inevitable dissertation on dress.

"It would be rude to take a book and entertain myself with other people's thoughts," she mused, when at last Mrs. Trent succumbed to her after-dinner somnolence, and Theodora posed herself in an attitude of graceful indolence, "but I am apparently at liberty to indulge my own—such as they are."

There was a circular mirror on the wall opposite her, and

between the candles burning on each side of it she could see the fireside group ; the elder lady sleeping in her chair, comfortable and handsome, and the younger one almost as motionless, with one ringed hand supporting the fair, regular face, round which the mirror showed such gorgeous setting of silk and gold.

In each of us lurks some vein of true genius. Though sometimes so slight that, in the gloom of unappreciation, or the glory of a greater light, it is not seen, the golden thread is pretty sure to be there.

Theodora Trent possessed no brilliant talent or versatile powers. She had no depth, or force, or strength of character, but she had that one slender filament in her nature, and knew its power. She understood exactly how far the splendour of dress was needed to give effect to her shallow, toneless beauty ; and in this matter, which was her one deep study, she was thoroughly and, indeed, to a certain extent, dangerously skilled. At every ball she attended (and Miss Trent favoured all she could, both in town and county) she was looked upon as a formidable rival by many a prettier and brighter and better girl ; and not a few of the young men who stood up with her to dance felt proudly conscious of having won the most admired partner in the room. What wonder ? The face is, after all, but a trifling part of the whole ; and who would miss variety and brightness there, when they found it in the manifold adornments which Theodora carried so well ?

Honor's eyes lingered long on these two figures, hardly glancing for a moment at her own, so still and white.

"Suppose," she mused idly to herself, "that were the mirror of Lao, and reflected the mind as well as the person. What should I see ? Not much," she added, with a half-smile, still unconsciously ignoring her own image ; "there is not much in either Mrs. Trent or Theodora which it would need Lao's glass to reflect."

As she thought this, still with her eyes on the mirror the door behind her was opened, and another figure was added to the group on which she gazed. Then an involuntary and rather puzzled feeling rose in her mind, that this figure had given a new character to the picture.

"Now," she said letting her fanciful thoughts run on — "if it were but the glass of Lao *now* !"

Most probably Royden Keith would have objected to enter the room at all if that circular mirror had been the magic instrument she thought of, but, being the harmless reflector it was, he sat down opposite it with the greatest ease, and was, to all appearance, totally unconscious of its very presence on the wall.

Mrs. Trent, wide awake now, graciously called Honor over to sit beside her while she sipped her tea ; and then entreated her daughter to sing a duet with Hervey, and to persuade Mr. Keith to sing with her too.

Theodora did sing with her cousin, once or twice, and then once or twice alone ; then once or twice with Mr. Keith, but Honor had not been asked, when, feeling the neglect acutely, she rose and said that she must go home.

"Jane told me to be early," she explained, standing before Mrs. Trent, with a fading flush upon her cheeks. And just then the mirror gave back a lovely picture, while Royden Keith stood waiting for his hand-shake. There was no intentness in his gaze, yet for all his life this picture lived unblemished in his memory.

"This is a new idea, Honor," observed Captain Trent, coming forward with a shade of annoyance on his face. "Why should Jane's wishes be paramount ? Are they not alone at The Larches to-night ?"

"I hope so."

"Whom are you afraid of finding at home ?" inquired Theodora, wondering why Mr. Keith smiled, when of course he could not understand anything about Honor's home.

"I know," drawled Hervey, with his lazy smile ; "it's little Slimp."

"Yes," echoed Honor, demurely ; "it's little Slimp."

"Slimp—Slimp ? I have surely heard that name before," put in Royden, with a great amusement in his eyes. "I almost think I have had the honour of seeing the gentleman to whom the name belongs ; a man of huge proportions and frank expression of countenance ; a man without fear, or guile, or—— Way are you laughing, Miss Craven ?"

"If you had tried to describe the exact opposite of the Mr. Slimp I know," said Honor, "you could not have succeeded better."

"Indeed ! Then please describe the Mr. Slimp you know."

"Not I, Mr. Keith," laughed the girl, "except to tell you that, like Slender, 'he hath but a little wee face, with a little yellow beard—a Cain-coloured beard.'"

"And you do not like him?"

"Like him!" The shy, proud colour was rising again under Royden's steadfast gaze. "Not one atom!" she said, as she gave her hand to Mrs. Trent. And in that tone of prompt contempt she dropped the subject.

"If you are walking home, you will, I hope, allow me to walk with you, Miss Craven."

Theodora looked up in surprise. One of the men-servants had always been sent to attend Honor back to The Larches after an evening at Deergrove. Surely that was sufficient, without Mr. Keith offering his escort. "That is unnecessary," interposed Captain Hervey, stopping as he loitered towards the door; "I am going with Miss Craven."

"And you, Mr. Keith," said Theodora, advancing with her gracious smile, "must stay and play that game of chess which I have set my heart upon. See how early it is, and I am ready. Good night again, Honor."

* * * * *

"Mamma," said Theodora, an hour later, when the mother and daughter were left alone together, "you must ask Mr. Keith to stay with us for a week or two; he is only at the hotel, you know, and you might quite properly do it while Hervey is here."

Mrs. Trent's breath came for a minute in hurried gasps.

"Theo," she said, "I have been surprised at you all the evening; I am doubly surprised now. Pray do not let Hervey see this sudden and ridiculous infatuation."

"Hervey will never see anything in me which is ridiculous," was Theo's complacent rejoinder; "but, mamma, you must own how immeasurably superior Mr. Keith is to the men one generally meets."

"And after all, what do we know of him?" inquired the elder lady, pettishly.

"This," returned the younger one, as if the subject were a pleasant one to her, and she were quite willing to linger over it. "We know that he is a thorough and perfect gentleman, to whom society has evidently thrown open her doors. We know that he has travelled a great deal, and

seen a great deal, and is very clever. We know how different he looked from all the gentlemen at the Castle the other night, and how jealous the girls were about him, and we see how womanish he makes Hervey look. And we know," concluded Theodora, moving her head slowly before the glass to catch the light upon the jewelled butterfly in her hair, "that he is very rich."

"Theo, my dear," urged Mrs. Trent, cautiously—for, like all weak and indulgent mothers, she dreaded her daughter's displeasure being turned directly against herself—"of course you can enjoy Mr. Keith's society while he stays in this neighbourhood, but you will be most unwise if you excite Hervey's jealousy. Mr. Keith may be a rich man—I do not doubt it—but what would his wealth be compared with that which Hervey is likely to inherit? Remember, Theo, that my heart is set upon your making a good match. It is," concluded Mrs. Trent, pathetically, "the only aim for which I care to live."

"All right, mamma," returned Theodora, brusquely; "I will take care that your aim is attained. I will not quarrel with Hervey, but I will do just as I like at present."

* * * * *

Royden Keith had, like his fellow-guest, walked to Deergrove that evening, and now was walking back to Kinbury. It was a pleasant autumn night, and he went leisurely and thoughtfully along the highway, until he entered the town close to the hotel where he was staying. Then he quickened his steps, for in front of the lighted entrance there stood a tax-cart and a foaming little thoroughbred which he knew. A servant-man in a livery of white and green—a livery we have seen before at the roadside tavern near Abbotsmoor—touched his hat from the driver's seat as Royden passed into the vestibule of the hotel, where another servant, in the same livery, came forward to meet him.

"What is it?" asked Royden, as he pleasantly returned the man's respectful greeting.

"A letter, sir."

"Any orders to yourselves?" inquired Royden, as he took the letter.

"No orders, sir, except what you should give us."

"Then go back at once. Say I am coming to-morrow."

Take something at the bar, and send Morris to do the same ; then drive back at once. Good night."

Seated in his own room, with the lamp lighted and the shutters closed, Royden read the letter. The writing was clear and the lines uncrossed, but yet it took him a long time to read ; for the sheets of paper were large and transparent, as if the letter had come from, or was destined for, some distant country.

When he had finished, and replaced the two thin sheets within their cover, he rose and rang his bell.

"I want," he said when the door was opened by a grave, middle-aged man in black, "to speak to Edwards. Send him up here, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are the other men gone?"

"Some time ago, sir."

The groom, whom his master had called Edwards, donned his livery hastily when his master's valet summoned him.

"I know what it is," he muttered : "a gallop all the way to the Towers and back. That's just like him."

"If you mean he'd take the gallop himself and think nothing of it, you're about right," returned the valet, curtly ; "but unless that *is* what you mean, you are a good way off being right ; for he isn't one to send his servants galloping about when they ought to be in bed."

"No, he isn't generally," acquiesced the groom, a little less sulkily ; "but it does make one cross to have to dress again. Do I look all right now, Mr. Pierce?"

The "gentleman's gentleman" smiled with generous condescension. "You are a vain, churlish fellow," it said, as plain as smile could speak ; "but what else can one expect in a groom—and so young a one?"

He smiled still more when the groom returned to him in ten minutes' time, brisk, alert, and good-humoured, as he had been in his master's presence.

"If it's 'just like him' for the master to drive his men about inconsiderately and inconsistently," the valet remarked, aloud, "I wonder why they should look as if they felt all the pleasanter for their interviews with him. He doesn't quite treat you as if you were cattle—eh, Edwards?"

"He's going off at dawn," explained the groom, ignoring

that question ; " I'm to have Princess saddled by the first glimpse of daylight. He's writing now, and told me to tell you not to stay up. He'll be back to-morrow afternoon, he says. Where d'you think he's going, Mr. Pierce ? "

" I know," said Pierce, quietly, as he turned away, " he's going home."

" Home ! " echoed the younger man, when he was left to himself. " I don't know much, p'raps ; but I do know what that means."

CHAPTER IV.

I do not love thee, Doctor Fell—
The reason why I cannot tell ;
But this alone I know full well,
I do not love thee, Doctor Fell.

Tom Brown.

It was no very new thing for Captain Trent to be walking with Honor Craven along the road which lay between Deergrove and The Larches, but something seemed to strike him as new in the performance to-night.

" You are not talking at all," Honor," he said at last, when the reason of the novelty dawned upon him. " What a very unusual thing ! It does not show nicely-regulated manners to talk a good deal at one time, and say nothing at all at another."

" Hervey," said the girl, pausing suddenly in her walk, and turning her eyes upon him so that he could see their laughter in the gloom, " don't you lecture me when nobody is present. When Mrs. Trent and Theodora are by, it affords them great pleasure to hear you, so I don't mind ; but when we have no audience we will have no performance, please. On those occasions—being, as they are, very few and very far between—we will imagine ourselves on an equality. Now we will talk as much as you like, for I shall soon be at home. Hervey, who is Mr. Keith ? "

" Why do you want to know ? " inquired Captain Trent, speaking sharply, but whether in consequence of Honor's introductory speech or of that last question was not clear.

" It does not signify ; I can find out from Lawrence."

"He is as likely to be an adventurer as not," suggested Hervey, spitefully; "looking after Theodora for her fortune, and for her expectation of a share of old Myddelton's money."

"I should have thought you old enough to know a true gentleman when you met him," observed Honor, with provoking gravity. "And if he really is come to woo Theodora, what shall you do?"

"Why?" he asked, his tone a trifle harsh, either in anger or self-consciousness.

"Because you are to marry her, you know."

"Do not say 'you know,' Honor; it is unnecessary and inelegant, and I do *not* know, though you do, it would seem."

"Of course I do; everybody knows it."

"Of course I could win her if I chose," mused Hervey, complacently, "if that is what you mean by everybody knowing I am to do so."

Honor's laugh rang fresh and clear on the night air, and naturally it roused Captain Hervey's languid wrath.

"It is childish to laugh at nothing, as you do, Honor."

"Only yesterday you told me it was childish to laugh at everything. You are inconsistent, Hervey, if you guide me at once in opposite directions."

"If Mr. Keith wins Theodora and her fortune," remarked Hervey, presently, with an idea of stern retaliation, "what will Lawrence Haughton do? Because everybody knows, as you say, that Lawrence is to marry a rich wife if he marries at all."

No answer, so he put the question direct.

"Do you think Haughton will marry a rich wife?"

"I hope he will."

"Why?"

"Because," she answered, with a tightening of her lips, "he won't be at all happy if he does—men never are who marry for money—nor will she. It is you who are laughing at nothing now, Hervey."

"Your notions of the world seem to be gleaned from novels. Why do you not wish he would marry a penniless wife, just to spite Jane?"

"Because Jane would break the heart of the penniless wife."

"Honor!"

"Yes, I'm here."

"Why, you have tears in your voice ! Are you so unhappy at The Larches ?"

"I was not thinking of myself," returned Honor, hastily

"Don't grieve for Phœbe," said Hervey, in a tone of relief ; "she doesn't feel these things. It is far harder to you, Honor, to bear the love of the man you scorn, than it is to her to bear the scorn of the man she loves—poor girl !"

"Hervey, how dare you speak so !" cried Honor, passionately. "You know nothing about this—about Phœbe or about me. I will not allow you to talk so to me of my cousin, or of myself. Do not ever again pretend you can teach me to be a gentlewoman, for you do not yourself know how to be a gentleman ! Go back ! I'm quite safe ; I would rather not have you."

"My dear Honor," he began, in his most plausible tones, "you should try not to be so hasty. Why should I not mention what, to use your own words, everybody knows ? Phœbe makes no secret of her infatuation for Lawrence, and Lawrence makes no secret of his indifference to her, so why should I ? You make no secret of your indifference to Lawrence, and he certainly makes no secret of his infatuation for you, so why should I ?"

"It is most ungenerous," said Honor, hotly ; and then she maintained perfect silence for the rest of their walk.

The Larches was a sombre, red-brick house, standing a little way from the road, and separated from it by half-a-dozen yards of brick wall between two white gates at either end of the curved drive which passed the front door. At this door Honor stood in the darkness, wondering rather anxiously who would let her in. Hervey had left her at the gate ; but, though she did not know it, he was lingering there, waiting to see her safely into the house. He had not long to wait ; the door was opened promptly to her summons, and he saw her enter the lighted hall.

"It was Haughton himself who let her in," muttered Captain Trent as he walked away. "She will be vexed if no one else has waited up for her ; and certainly it cannot be by Phœbe's own choice that she has left Haughton to do it alone."

He hastened on now, "whistling as he went, for want of thought," and by this time Honor and Mr. Haughton had entered the warm and lighted drawing-room.

"Everyone gone to bed!" she exclaimed, a note of keen vexation in her tone. "Why did not Phœbe sit up for me? She promised she would, and I am as early as Jane bade me."

"I told Phœbe to go to bed," returned Mr. Haughton gently taking off the soft white shawl which Honor had worn under her dark cloak. "I chose to wait for you, and I did not need any one to keep me company."

Honor glanced at him for one moment as he stood in the full light, and then she quietly pushed away the chair he had drawn up to the fire for her.

Honor's guardian was a man of forty, a little above the middle height, but so broadly built that he looked below it. His hair was thickly streaked with gray, and his moustache gray too—was heavy and coarse; his face habitually shrewd and callous, and his eyes habitually keen and restless; for any other expression which might be upon his face to-night, or at other times when he was alone with Honor, was not its customary one. He was a powerful man, both physically and mentally; a man who seemed to have his passions and his words completely under his control, and who, if he had not, might be perhaps a dangerous man to thwart or anger. His clients spoke of him as a safe and self-concentrated lawyer, as hard to understand as to bend; a clever fellow, whose soft, white fingers could unravel, in that constant silence of his, the most intricate knot in law. But there was one inmate of his house who knew him in two characters, and who put no trust in either.

"I have coffee ready for you, Honor," said Mr. Haughton taking the coffee-pot from the fire and carrying it to the table where stood one solitary cup; "I know it will refresh you after your walk."

"Thank you," said Honor, but her voice, for all its gentleness, was utterly indifferent, and Lawrence Haughton noticed this.

"Have you had a pleasant evening?" he asked, rather nervously pursuing his unwonted and womanish task.

"A little better than usual," she said quietly; "but I'm very sleepy, Lawrence. May I go to bed?"

"Just wait until you have drunk this coffee, dear. I made it myself on purpose for you, and I have kept it hot, and fancied you would enjoy it."

He had come up to her then, with the cup in his hand, and she could not turn away. She took it with a little laugh, fresh and sweet.

"You look odd at that task, Lawrence. Why did you attempt it?"

"Because it was for you," he said, with a subdued eagerness in his tone. "There is no task I would not attempt for you, Honor."

"I hope there is," she answered, very gently: "and please let Phœbe keep her promise next time, and sit up for me, Lawrence."

"Any one but me," he said, a dark flush rising in his face; "yet my only pleasure through this day has been the anticipation of these few minutes, when I should have you here to talk to me and look at me, as you rarely do when you have others to see or speak to."

There was silence between them then, while he tried to school his tones to easy indifference such as hers, and while she wondered childishly whether her guardian's culinary achievement was known to his sister, whose one strong idea was that it was he who ought to be waited on by all the household.

"Who was at Deergrove to-night, Honor?"

Lawrence was standing against the mantel-piece, watching the face of the girl beside him; and it seemed as if, when she had answered the question, his gaze grew more intent and even stern.

"Only one gentleman—Mr. Keith. He is staying at the Royal Hotel in Kinbury now; he has been visiting Sir Philip Somerson at the Castle. I do not know whether he stays for the shooting, or because he likes the neighbourhood. Do you know him, Lawrence?"

"As much," returned Mr. Haughton, apparently making an effort to speak easily, "as I know any other idle young fellow who comes to stay in the town for a time, professedly for the Abbotsmoor fishing, or shooting, or what not—that is all."

"I will say good night now, Lawrence."

He put down the empty cup, and then took her offered hand. "Good night," he echoed; "how you hasten to utter it! Nothing I can do or say ever tempts you to linger with me. My beautiful child, my favourite, if you would only consent to learn one lesson from Phœbe!"

"I am too old to learn," said Honor, defying the pain which such words always gave her, in spite of their frequency. "Oh, Lawrence, I wish you were as sleepy as I am! You would hurry me off, and I should be so grateful to you afterwards."

"Honor," he said, looking longingly in her sweet, pure face, and still holding her hand tightly in his own, "years ago, when you were a little one—my favourite then as always, and even then the very sunshine of my life—you used to bring your good-night kiss and lay it softly on my lips. Do you remember? And do you remember how I would never let Phoebe kiss me afterwards? No, of course you do not. You were but a child; what could you know of such feelings, or of the dreams that were my very life-breath even then, and which you are trying now to kill for me?"

"If you could guess how unhappy you make me by talking so, Lawrence," the girl returned, still very gently, "I think you would not do it so often. Let us be just what we were in those times you have been talking of—cousins, as it were, or ward and guardian, which you will—but do not talk of other love between us. It is impossible. You know it, and you have known it always, if you would only own it to yourself. You know, too, that I have no home but yours; and, if you were generous, you would not take every opportunity of making me unhappy with this worn-out subject. Oh, why," she cried, her hands clasped tightly to her breast, "should you have given me this passion you call love? You knew I never could love you. You have yourself told me how I would not go near you when I first came here, a little child. You have told me how your sister tried in vain to teach me to admire you, and Phoebe tried in vain to teach me to worship you, and you yourself tried—oh, so much more in vain!—to teach me to love you. Knowing all this, why do you speak to me, so often, as you have done to-night? What right have I given you?"

"None. I have taken the right," said Lawrence, his breath quick and hard. "Your pride and indifference, through these ten years, has only made my love all the stronger—never mind why, we cannot understand these things—but you are a woman now, and must repay me for

these years of pain and waiting, Honor. This long and slighted love of mine *shall* win a return. You cannot crush or kill it, for it is stronger than yourself, and will conquer you."

"I shall go away from here if you ever speak to me so again," said the girl, with a flash of wrath in her eyes, "or I must pass it by as something too—too trivial for notice."

"And I," returned Lawrence, speaking as sternly as he ever could to her, "shall never leave off telling you of my love until you own your love is mine at last."

She walked quietly from the room even while he spoke; but he followed her, eager to do something for her even then.

"Why, Lawrence," she said, taking her candle from his hand, and by an effort speaking in her old tones, just as if that interview had never been, "there is a light in your room! Who is there?"

"Only Slimp," returned Mr. Haughton, looking with annoyance towards the line of light from the door of his private room. "He has a deed to copy for me, and he's late over it. Never mind him; he will not be here for breakfast."

"*Those* are good tidings," said Honor, emphatically; and, glancing at the door with an inimitable mimicry of Mr. Slimp's normal expression, she ran lightly and noiselessly upstairs.

Mr. Haughton, smiling at the remembrance of her comical grimace, watched her till she turned out of sight, and then entered his own room, the stern and watchful man of business now, the unmoved man of the world.

"You have all your instructions, Slimp, so you can go to bed when you like. There will be breakfast for you in this room at seven, and you will be gone before I come down."

"Very well, sir," was Mr. Slimp's unquestioning assent. But he looked as if he understood an omitted margin to the words; and if Honor had been there, she might have looked in vain for the deed he had been copying.

"Do the Temple thoroughly; study the records, and leave no stone unturned. I have written on the back of this card a few headings to remind you, and on the other side is the name. Keep the card carefully—I had trouble enough to get it."

Mr. Slimp took it from Mr. Haughton's hand deliberately;

read the pencilled instructions through with still more deliberation ; then turned the card round, and read the name engraved upon the other side—"Royden Keith."

CHAPTER V.

HERMIA.—I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA.—O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill !

HERMIA.—The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA.—The more I love, the more he hateth me.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

"ASLEEP, Phœbe ?"

At the sound of Honor's bright voice, and at the sight of her face round the half-opened door of Phœbe's bed-room, a head sprang from the pillow, and an eager whisper bade her come in and shut the door.

So Honor came in and shut the door, obediently ; then, putting her candlestick down upon the dressing-table, and taking up an easy position on the bed, with her back against the iron footrail, she looked across into her cousin's face, and remarked, sententiously, that she was back again. And then her wakeful eyes went wandering round the little untidy chamber as if it were all strange to them, with a shadow in them deeper than their wonder—a shadow which now and then *did* fall upon their brightness at odd times and in familiar scenes, as if, even yet, the life which had been hers ever since she could remember, had its dark, inscrutable corners which she searched in vain.

There was little to gaze upon in this bed-room of Phœbe's, so it was no wonder that the girl's eyes soon came back to the face opposite her, and rested there.

"Why, Phœbe," Honor said then, "you have been crying !"

Phœbe was sitting up in bed, with her hands locked about her knees, and her broad, Dutch-looking face—rather pretty, but soulless and self-absorbed—was flushed and stained with tears.

"Crying ?" she stammered, and both the repetition of the word and the mortified gaze betrayed the dependence

and the self-consciousness of her character. "Why should you say so?"

"I am led to that conclusion by the sight of tears. Am I as wise as that doctor's assistant who knew his patient had been eating horse because he caught sight of the saddle under the bed?"

"I did cry," replied Phœbe, plaintively, "because Lawrence would not let me sit up for you, as I'd promised, and because he hardly spoke to me all the evening."

"What a relief!" remarked Honor, devoutly.

"Not to me," sighed Phœbe; "you know it isn't."

"Yes, I know—I do know," rejoined Honor, pitifully, for how could she help pitying the girl who could perpetually court sympathy for having, unasked and with utter absence of pride, or even self-respect, laid her shallow heart at her guardian's feet? "Yes, I know, Phœbe, and I only thought of myself when I spoke. But I do really believe that some day you will say, with me, that it is a relief when Lawrence does not speak."

"I never should," said Phœbe, with a sigh. "I'm not so surprised that he takes no notice of me when you are here; but when you are away it is worse. He does not talk at all then; he hardly stays in the room with us. Oh, Honor, I wish I didn't care! But I do; and—do you think he will ever be different?"

"I hope so, in many ways," said Honor, sagely; "but I think, if it ever came to happen that he offered his love to you, Phœbe, you would see all at once, that it wasn't worth taking. Has it been very dull for you then, poor little Frau?"—one of Honor's pet names for her Dutch-visaged cousin.

"Jane was as cross as she could be," spoke Phœbe, emphatically; "and she said lots of unkind things about your going to Deergrove, till Lawrence stopped her; he said afterwards she was never to speak of you before Mr. Slimp."

"Oh, he was here—I forgot that!" cried Honor, with a soft little laugh. "I saw him. I caught a delightful glimpse of him through the half-closed door—sitting so."

Phœbe laughed—though in a rather spiritless manner—at her cousin's quaint imitation of Mr. Slimp's attitude; and then Honor turned the subject delicately from that complaint which Phœbe delighted to outpour.

"Stop a moment, Phœbe. Give me time to get down from the bed, and I'll give you a rare representation of Theo's manners to-night ; especially of her reception and her farewell."

The ceremony of greeting and speeding a decidedly poor relation—whose part in the scene was of course purely imaginary—was performed with perfect gravity, though its ludicrous side was evident from the laughter which chased away all Phœbe's discontent. Then followed a slight exhibition of Captain Hervey's languid deportment, and the elegant sleepiness which Mr. Trent could always manage to maintain, undisturbed by the keen watch she kept upon her daughter, and the frequent lessons she vouchsafed to Honor.

Then Honor ceased her acting and took up her candlestick.

"If you and I were rich," mourned Phœbe, plaintively, "and could dress and talk grandly, they would behave quite differently to us, Honor. They wouldn't invite us to Deergrove just on sufferance, one at a time, as they do now when they have a place vacant, to make us small and patronise us, and pretend they are doing a very noble and compassionate sort of thing to their poor relations."

"That will do, Phœbe. Never mind that old grudge," returned Honor, brightly. "I never let them treat me like a poor relation, and I can often glean a little amusement there."

"I cannot," sighed Phœbe ; "they quench me entirely. I always come home miserable, and wishing I was rich and beautiful and admired, that I might pay back Theo for her scornful ways. Honor, do you ever have day-dreams about being rich ?"

"Often. Such gorgeous dreams they are, and I'm so beautiful in them, and wear such matchless dresses, and have horses, and carriages, and servants, and a magnificent castle of my own, and I feed all the poor, and have all the sick cured, and everybody idolises me, and I'm presented to the Queen—so," explained Honor, sweeping her skirt along the shabby drugget, in the performance of a wonderful curtsy, "and all the ladies and lords-in-waiting whisper that there never was such a lovely person seen before, even at Court."

"Perhaps they're not allowed to whisper when the Queen is by," put in Phœbe, her practical nature stumbling here.

"I'm quite certain that the Earl of Essex often whispered," returned the younger girl, with confidence, "and Anne Boleyn was just the one to whisper a great deal when she was a maid-of-honour; and so they whisper in my dreams, and everything is wonderful and beautiful there, Phoebe; but I never care about crowing over Theo—she isn't in the dreams at all."

Phoebe had so thoroughly taught herself to lean upon Honor's deeper, brighter nature that it gave her generally a curious air of dependence and submission to her younger cousin, totally at variance to her superiority in point of years. But there were times when she roused herself to a fleeting priority, on the basis of her freedom from those deceptions encouraged by a disposition so dreamy, credulous, and speculative as her cousin's. At such rare moments she believed implicitly Jane Haughton's favourite axiom that "Honor had not a grain of sterling common sense," and invest herself abundantly with that oft-misnamed commodity. Such a moment followed Honor's soft voice-painting of her childish dream.

"You always go into impossibilities, Honor. I think only of what may be."

Impossibilities! While the white-clad figure, in spite of its dingy background and the scant light thrown upon it, was so purely beautiful! Impossibilities! While the eyes were so full of trust and courage for the time to come, and that time to come was so safely hidden beyond a golden mist made up of possibilities!

"You know Lady Lawrence may leave us a share of her wealth," added Phoebe, apparently aggrieved. "She ought not entirely to forget us girls, and leave it all to Lawrence or Hervey, or even both."

Honor's laugh rang out merrily.

"I am afraid we are all alike," she said: "all building our future on old Myddelton's money. Oh, what tottering fabrics! But your mentioning Lady Lawrence reminds me of something else, Phoebe. The Abbotsmoor picnic is fixed for Thursday, and the photograph, with Abbotsmoor itself as a background, is to be sent to Lady Lawrence in India."

"Oh, how nice!" cried Phoebe, ecstatically. "May we all choose our own postures, and by whom we will stand or

sit ? What shall I wear ? Oh, Honor, I have **not any** nice dress to go in."

"Have you not ?" asked Honor, always such a gentle, helpful receiver of these lugubrious and spasmodic expressions of Phœbe's anxieties respecting her wardrobe and deficiencies therein. "How is that ? I thought we should wear the dresses we had for the bazaar at Somerson Park."

"You can ; yours looks all right," whined Phœbe ; "and of course you will, because everybody said that it suited you ; but I cannot. Mine is as torn, and as soiled, and as shabby as ever it can be, and I'm sure I would not disgrace myself by putting it on."

Phœbe had risen in her excitement, and taken the dress from its drawer, and now she threw it contemptuously on the bed before Honor.

"It was very pretty at first, I know," she said, "and no one would believe you had done all the planning and trimming, for they looked like French dresses. But you must own, Honor, that I could not wear it now."

"If you like," said Honor, slowly, not questioning Phœbe's right to have spoiled the dress while her own—bought, and made, and worn at the same time—was fresh and unsoiled, "if you like, Phœbe, we will wear our black silks."

"Black silks at a pic-nic !" exclaimed Phœbe. "No, indeed. But it was a kind offer of yours, Honor," she added. remorsefully, "for your dress is almost as good as new, and you look so lovely in it. But I'll tell you what you might do"—this in a tone of anxious coaxing—"you might get Lawrence to give us money for a new one each. Tell him how we have not five shillings left of this quarter's allowance. He will not refuse you, Honor."

"I would go in my oldest dress sooner than ask for a new one from him," returned the younger girl ; "I always keep within my allowance for that very reason."

Phœbe's eyes filled ; they were gentle, rather prominent, light gray eyes, with a fountain very near them ; but still these ready tears had always the same effect upon Honor ; and when Phœbe said, ruefully, "He would not give time, or I would ask for myself ; but he never refuses you," she kissed her quietly, and said she would ask their guardian for

the dress, and did not blame her, by one word, for the selfish use she made of her guardian's favourite.

"I shall sleep comfortably now," observed Phœbe, shaking up her pillow. "Good night, Honor dear ; though you have not told me much about Deergrove. Was there no guest but yourself?"

"Only one," said Honor, from the open doorway ; "but—go to sleep, Phœbe."

"For," added the girl to herself, as she closed the bedroom door behind her, "if I speak or think again of that other guest, my thoughts will go off once more to Gabriel Myddelton and that often-told story which I heard again to-night. How plain it was that Mr. Keith saw no way of accounting for the murder but by Gabriel's having committed it ! How curiously he asked if a doubt had *ever* been entertained as to Gabriel's guilt, and no one could say 'Yes' !"

* * * * *

Next morning, from a feverish dream in which old Myddelton was murdering Mr. Keith, and she and Gabriel—just as he might have walked out of the picture at Abbotsmoor—stood looking on, Honor was roused by the clanging of the shrill bell which was wont, at eight o'clock A.M., to summon the occupants of The Larches to break their fast upon the sternly simple viands which Miss Haughton's ingenuity and economy had suggested.

"Late again," remarked that lady, as Honor entered the breakfast-room half-an-hour afterwards, sweet and fresh as a summer rose on which the dew-drops sparkle, and with that clear light within her eyes which could not have shone there if the soul behind had not been free from taint of vanity or selfishness.

Mr. Haughton half rose from his seat as Honor came up to the table, but, with a sudden change of purpose, he drew his chair closer, and began to carve the cold meat before him.

His sister passed by the girl's bright "good morning," and poured out her tea with a rigid displeasure stamping every feature. Jane Haughton was certainly not one of those whose presence at any time makes sunshine in a house. Hers had, on the contrary, rather the effect of February sleet or a November fog ; but in the early morning this was peculiarly noticeable.

"A real wet blanket," Honor thought, as she took her cup from Jane's hand, "would have a far more soothing effect."

Conversation at The Larches was never very warm and general, especially at breakfast ; but certainly this morning, as on many another morning, Honor tried her best to make it so. She chatted of her visit last night, and described the dinner to Jane, undeterred by that lady's stoniness of aspect. She gave Phœbe an account of the dresses, the new books she had seen, and the new duet she had heard, undisturbed by Phœbe's distracted attention and surreptitious signs to her not to forget her promise ; and she retailed to Lawrence the chief points of the conversation.

"That other guest," remarked Mr. Haughton, "must have been vastly edified by so much talk of old Myddelton and his connections, especially after the speech I heard old Mrs. Payte make to him a day or two ago."

"What was that?"

"She said old Myddelton's relations could be nothing but money-loving and cowardly."

"Oh, what a falsehood and a shame!" cried Phœbe, always ready to reply to him. "Suppose she knew you had overheard that, Lawrence?"

"I believe she did know," he answered, carelessly ; "*she* does not care who overhears her sour speeches."

"What did Mr. Keith say?" inquired Jane.

"Do you suppose I cared to listen?"

"It must be satisfactory to him," said Honor, quietly, "to feel that he has not been deceived in his estimate of us. There is plenty of cowardice and love of money amongst us."

"There may be these qualities amongst us," replied Lawrence, looking into the girl's eyes, "but there is neither of them in you, Honor."

"They belong to the very name of Myddelton," returned Honor, with a hot, vexed blush, for nothing distressed her more than such a speech from him in presence of his sister and poor little Phœbe, "and he sees how we all hate each other in our hearts, and he knows we shall hate each other until Lady Lawrence's will is read, when we shall immediately concentrate all our hatred upon her heir."

"It's all Gabriel Myddelton's fault," sighed Phœbe. "that these dreadful things are laid to our charge ; but,

Honor, you know very well that it is only the Trents who hate"—

Phœbe broke off abruptly in her speech, for Mr. Haughton had left the room, and she had something far more important to urge upon Honor than any want of affection in the Trents.

"Go now," she whispered across the table, "remember your promise, Honor."

Honor put her chair back into its place against the wall—according to one of Jane's most strictly enforced lessons—and left the room too.

In the hall, as she paused in her extreme unwillingness to enter Lawrence's study, Phœbe rushed out to her, almost breathless in her eagerness.

"Make haste, Honor," she cried, pushing her cousin towards the door of Mr. Haughton's study, "he may go off in a hurry. Why should you dawdle here when you know he will do it for you? This is too unkind of you, Honor."

"Take your hands away; leave me to open the door myself," said Honor, with a quick catch of her breath; "I will not be dragged to do what I have—promised."

When Honor entered the room, her guardian was locking the drawers of his writing-table. He had taken the key from the last, and put the bunch into his pocket, before he saw her, or heard her quiet tread. Then he stepped back to the chimney-piece, and looked at her with a pleased smile—quite willing, evidently, that she should detain him as long as she chose.

"Please, Lawrence," the girl began simply, "will you let Phœbe have a little money this morning?"

"No. I have told Phœbe a hundred times that if I permit her to overdraw her allowance, she will grow more and more extravagant, and will not be able to extricate herself."

Honor could not see that this impatient retort was chiefly evoked in his sudden disappointment by finding that it was for some one else's sake that she had sought him; she only saw that he looked firm in his refusal.

"I have told her this a hundred times," he repeated; "and I will not trouble myself to tell her again. She is absurd and wasteful in her expenditure. Tell her to do as you do; you have the same allowance, and you always look neat—"

"Jane says if there was another person in the house like me she should be driven wild."

"A pretty safe speech," sneered Lawrence; "the *if* is a huge one. Jane's reason for the feeling, poor old girl, is not inscrutable, though. You forgive those speeches, Honor," he added, in another tone, "when you remember how jealously she guards my affection? You can understand why she is harder to you than to Phoebe? She is not afraid of Phoebe's ever supplanting——"

"Phoebe is a great deal smaller than Jane, why should Jane be afraid?"

"Laughing, always laughing," muttered Mr. Haughton. "Is life to be all a jest for you?"

A soft, quick shadow fell upon the girl's face. She was but eighteen, and an orphan. Into no mother's listening ear and loving heart could she whisper the doubts, and hopes, and longings which troubled and cheered her. Upon no father's arm had she lent through all her girlhood; no father's strong and steadfast love had guided and taught her. And beyond! What awaited this girl whose generous aims and impulses were all thrown back upon herself in this cramped home? What awaited her beyond? Was life to be all a jest? No wonder such a swift, sad shadow fell upon her face like a foreboding.

"Let Jane say what she will, Honor," spoke Lawrence, extending his hand to her. "You shall be denied nothing while I am master here."

"I was not thinking of Jane's speech," she said, rousing herself from that moment's inexplicable sadness, and moving a little back from the outstretched hand. "Will you give Phoebe the money, please, Lawrence?"

"No," he answered, angrily, but very slowly, as he gazed into her face; "but I will give it you if you like."

"I do not want it," began Honor, in haste, but he went on after her interruption, as if he had not hesitated.

"You may do as you like with it, of course; spend it for Phoebe, if you choose, or give it to her to spend. I do not care what is done with it afterwards. How much is it to be? Is this enough?"

He had taken two sovereigns from his purse, but he held the purse still open.

"Phœbe only wished for one," said Honor, in her proud, quiet tones.

"I did not ask Phœbe," returned Mr. Haughton, closing the purse, and once more holding his hand towards Honor, with the money in it; "take them, Honor. Of course Phœbe bade you ask, but, come at whose bidding you will, you know that I never could refuse a request of yours. Some day, perhaps, the favours you come to ask will be for yourself, as they used to be in old times. Take it. Why do you wait so long?"

Slowly and daintily, with barely a touch of her soft, white fingers, she took the gold coins from his palm.

"Thank you, Cousin Lawrence."

"*Cousin* Lawrence!" he echoed, angrily. "You are skilled in wounding, Honor, and I am a stone, of course, and cannot feel or see. I am not supposed to know that you avoid touching my hand, when you do it with such gentle grace. I am not supposed to know that you shrink from any obligation to me, when you thank me so prettily. Cousin! Bah! that one word is hateful to me from your lips."

"Is it?" asked Honor, gravely. "Would you have me say *Uncle* Lawrence? Would this sound better—Thank you, Uncle Lawrence?"

"Is that all the payment you will give me?" inquired Mr. Haughton, his anger giving way to amusement, as it generally did when he talked with her.

"Yes, that is all," she answered, speaking to him just as she used to do when she was a child, and had not learned the secret of why it was she to whom he always listened, and she whose company he always sought. "Phœbe will repay her own debts."

"I want no thanks from Phœbe," he interrupted, moodily. "Let her have her ribbons and flowers and foolery, and be content. Do not send her with her gushing thanks to me. What is it? What makes you look so hurt and proud? The old story, eh, of my duty to Phœbe as her guardian—of my unkindness—of her wasted affection, may be? I do not know; I am not to blame in the matter; *you* can testify to that, Honor. Do not turn away. Listen for one moment, my little favourite. You can set every-

thing straight. Phœbe shall have what she likes, dresses and feathers to satiety—if you will give me what I want.”

“I could not, Cousin Lawrence,” said Honor, with a demure shake of the head, “because what you want is a contented mind.”

Then she gave him her bright little daring nod, and, leaving him, ran upstairs with the news for which Phœbe was so anxiously waiting.

“We’ll walk into Kinbury this afternoon and buy the dress,” exclaimed Phœbe, in a rapture of delight, “and we shall be able to make it ourselves to-morrow, and so can spend all the extra money on trimmings.”

“Yes,” said Honor, kindly, knowing on whom the cutting and the trimming and the chief work would fall; “yes, we can do it to-morrow, and have it all ready for Thursday morning; and on our way home this afternoon we will call at East Cottage. Now I am going to see if I can help Jane.”

CHAPTER VI.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone or despise;
For nought that sets one's heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemed in her eyes.

LOWELL.

WHEN Miss Owen's all-important purchases were made, Honor made one which excited Phœbe's curiosity amazingly. Yet it was only a packet of wools of various shades and colours, and a roll of fine canvas.

“Why carry it?” Phœbe asked, as Honor took this parcel in her hand. “Let it be sent with the other things.”

“No,” whispered Honor. “It is not large enough to be inconvenient—I wish it were.”

On their way home, the girls stopped before a low white cottage standing in a long garden where flowers, fruits, and vegetables grew promiscuously.

“Oh! do not go in here,” exclaimed Phœbe, pettishly. “Mrs. Payte is such a disagreeable old woman, and Mrs.

Disbrowe so dull and depressing. Come along, Honor ; they haven't seen us."

Honor had unfastened the gate by this time.

"If you wish to walk on, Phoebe, do," she said ; "and I will overtake you."

But Phoebe had no wish to walk on by herself, and, moreover, the thought struck her that, if they loitered here, perhaps Lawrence might overtake them on his way home from his office. So she followed Honor up the garden path.

A small, sharp-faced old lady, in a broad-brimmed hat and leather gloves, stood on the gravel path before the cottage windows, leaning on a garden hoe, which looked heavy and cumbersome in the tiny hands of this small old lady. Her bright, shrewd eyes shone steadily from under the brim of her ugly brown hat as she watched the girls coming ; but her thin lips broke into no smile of welcome, and she advanced no step to meet her visitors.

Behind her, at the open window of the cottage parlour, sat another lady, totally different in appearance, though probably of the same age. Both were widows ; yet, while Mrs. Disbrowe wore the dress which belongs to lifelong widowhood, little Mrs. Payte had decked herself in an artistic combination of colours. Both were at least seventy years of age ; yet, while Mrs. Disbrowe lay in her large chair, calm and tranquil, as sweet old age should be, and with the soft white hair and patient eyes which a sweet old age should wear, Mrs. Payte's small figure stood firm and erect, and her keen, quick eyes and mobile features had still the restlessness and strength of youth.

It needed no second glance to tell that the government of East Cottage was on the shoulders of the smaller lady, and that the invalid sitting at the window in the September sunshine was fully and humbly aware of this. The old ladies had not been particularly reticent about their private or personal affairs ; so it was no secret in the village that the rooms at East Cottage had been taken not only to benefit Mrs. Disbrowe's health, but because Mrs. Payte found it convenient to stay here at present to economise. It was on that very subject that Mrs. Payte was speaking to her friend, when the garden gate opened to admit the girls.

"We have been here nearly two months," she was saying,

"and I don't see any improvement in your health, Selina ; indeed, I think you lie down more than ever ; and I'm sure, on such a morning as this"—Honor was near enough now for her quick young ears to catch every word—"you might very well exert yourself a little. I hate to see people giving way to thorough indolence. Here's Honor Craven—she'll tell you how pleasant it is out of doors."

"It is quite as pleasant at the open window, Mrs. Disbrowe," said Honor, with a gentle smile into the patient's worn face, as she went up to the window and took the invalid's hand—"quite as pleasant"—this with a little emphasis, half in fun, half in earnest, as she turned again to shake the leather-gloved hand which Mrs. Payte extended leisurely.

"I'm very poorly myself," asserted the small old lady, with a defiant expression in every feature which the brown hat shaded ; "only no one ever notices. As for Selina, she never thinks any one suffers but herself ; and she—why, she sleeps all night like a top, and I may toss and sigh, and she hears nothing of it. If I could sleep as she does, I wouldn't call myself ill. Dear me, Honor, you need not look at her in that sort of sickeningly compassionate way. If she could hear every word, it would not hurt her, but she cannot. She gets deafer every day, and only hears me when I shout at the top of my voice. You needn't be afraid of hurting *her*. Do you wonder that my patience is exhausted, when you see how lackadaisical she is—eh, Phœbe ?"

"Indeed I do not," said Phœbe ; for of course it was easier and wiser to concur with the sharp-tempered old lady, when Phœbe knew the invalid could not hear.

"You know very well how worried I am with her, and how my patience is tried—don't you, Honor ?"

"I see how *her* patience is tried, Mrs. Payte," the girl said, softly. "To lighten her suffering, if that were possible, or ease the tedium of her days, could hardly be worry for any one to whom the opportunity is given."

"Dear me !" exclaimed the old lady, shrilly. "One would think you envied me the pleasant occupation."

"I think I do," said Honor, thoughtfully ; "I so often and often think of her—how she is suffering hour after hour without hope of ease, yet without complaint, and I do so long to be able to do something to make the pain more bearable."

"I verily believe you mean it," was the slow retort, as Mrs. Edna Payte looked with keen scrutiny into the girl's earnest face; "you look as if you did. Well, we shall soon see how hollow this idea is, for I give you leave from this moment to take what share you will of this tedious and enervating occupation. There—now you won't make that speech again, I fancy."

"May I come when I like?" inquired Honor, earnestly. "May I do whatever I can, to cheer her or relieve her? May I really, Mrs. Payte?"

"You may do whatever you choose," returned the old lady, with complacent contempt; "we will soon see how little that will be, now the way is clear for you. We are all anxious enough to walk up the 'straight and thorny path to heaven' so long as we cannot find it; but as soon as ever it lies there right before our eyes, like the side of a precipice covered with briars, why, then we sneak back again, and leave off talking about it. Well," after a pause, "why don't you contradict me, child, and say how sure you are that you can tread safely among the adders, and the tangles, and the pitfalls?"

"I dare not," said the girl, softly; "but you will not take back your promise?"

"Not yet," replied the old lady, smiling cynically into Honor's beautiful, earnest eyes; "I shall wait till I see the ashes of all your high-flown resolutions. There, that's enough of such nonsense. What's the news in Kinbury, girls?"

This was one of Mrs. Payte's unvarying questions, and Phoebe was prepared for it, and took a keen enjoyment in pouring into such willing ears all that she could tell of small news—the only giant among the items being the description of her new dress.

"Whose taste was it?" inquired Mrs. Payte, curtly, and Phoebe eagerly appropriated the credit, confessing, though without any malice, that indeed Honor wanted her not to have the fashionable mixture of pink and blue.

"If it is the fashion, have it," said Mrs. Payte, with terseness. "What is Honor's taste compared with fashion?"

"So I said," exclaimed Phoebe, delighted; "and I do not see why one should dress dowdily at a pic-nic, though

I'm sure I do not want to vex Honor, because she's going to help me make it."

"Certainly, don't vex her—for your own sake," advised the old lady, in those four last words hitting carelessly upon the main-spring of Phœbe's character.

"Is your allowance greater than Honor's, Phœbe?" inquired Mrs. Disbrowe, when the chief points of conversation became apparent to her.

"No, we have the same."

"Then I'm afraid you will always be behind-hand, and always wanting help," was the quiet reply; "for don't you remember what George Herbert says, 'Who cannot live on twentie poundes a yeare cannot on fortie'?"

"That's nonsense, of course," said Phœbe, "and it is not many girls who have to dress on forty pounds a year, as we have."

"Never mind," put in Mrs. Payte, encouragingly; "you may be rich enough some day, so it is worth while running short now. Have you heard anything lately from Lady Lawrence?"

"Yes," cried Phœbe, eagerly; "she is to be in England before Christmas, and we are all to meet her in London. She is preparing now to leave Calcutta."

"That's right," remarked Mrs. Payte, with an air of real anticipation. "I've a great wish to see this sister of old Myddelton's, and I may have a chance, if she comes to England. I like to come across a thoroughly wicked old woman."

"Is Lady Lawrence a thoroughly wicked old woman?" inquired Honor, laughing.

"Of course, being old Myddelton's sister and Gabriel's aunt. But you girls mustn't think of that. You must look upon her as a goddess or angel, whichever you like. Remember, she has a million to will away, as well as landed estates and princely incomes. You write affectionate epistles to her, eh?"

"I write every month," said Phœbe; "we all do. I dare say the Trents write oftener, and I am sure Lawrence does, but she never writes back, though she sent us her picture. She's a very grand and clever-looking person, enormously stout, and with smooth, dark hair."

"Mean people are always stout and clever," remarked Mrs. Payte, sententiously. "Do you write to her, Honor?"

"I have not lately," the girl answered, her eyes far off upon the horseman coming slowly along the turnpike road towards Kinbury. "I did when I was a child, just as the others do, for Lawrence ordered it, but I don't now."

"A bad result of being your own mistress," grumbled Mrs. Payte. "Why was it?"

"She never answered our letters," Honor said. "She did not care for us; so how can we care for her?"

"The others do, don't they?"

Phoebe laughed. "Care for her? why, of course not, Mrs. Payte. We're only trying to make ourselves agreeable to her."

"To be sure—that's what I mean. Most natural it is, and Honor should not hold herself aloof. Well, it isn't too late yet, that's one good thing. Take my advice, and write her a long, flattering, fond letter. Don't think about whether you really love her or not—that's not the question. She has money to leave to some of you, and, without caring a button about her, you may ingratiate yourselves. Young people seldom care much in reality about old women, and a little pretence is fair enough in such a case as this."

"That's what I say, and all of us," assented Phoebe, with a ready burst of heavy laughter, "all but Honor."

"All the same, Honor must own it's true, if she has any honesty at all," persisted the old lady, taking off her hat for a moment to smooth her small gray curls, and looking, the while, into Honor's face with ironical scrutiny.

"No; I do not own it, Mrs. Payte," the girl said, shaking her head with her pretty, gentle smile. "I do not own that pretence is fair, and I do not own that young people do not care for old women."

"Well, I've seen more than you have, and I've a right to say it. Who is this?"

The abrupt question made the invalid start, and Honor looked round to see the cause of it. At the cottage gate stood the horseman, whom, a few moments ago, she had been watching. He dismounted, fastened his horse to the gate, and then walked leisurely down the narrow path, three dogs following closely at his heels, evidently aware that they were not to go beyond the little box-border.

"You've been riding a long way, Mr. Keith," began Mrs. Payte, with her usual abruptness, when he offered his hand.

"Forty miles at least since daybreak," was the brief reply. But Mrs. Payte, without exactly knowing why, considered it a stumbling-block in the way of further questioning. She went through an elaborate ceremony in her introduction of Phœbe, and turned to repeat it for Honor's benefit ; but, to her surprise, she found Mr. Keith and Honor shaking hands.

One minute afterwards Honor had slipped away. Feeling that her presence would not be missed just then, she went to perform one errand on which her mind was bent, and which she always did perform in her visits to East Cottage. Hurrying round to the back-door, she entered a small kitchen, neat but barely furnished, in which a young woman sat sewing near the lattice window, a heavy pair of crutches beside her chair.

"Alone, Marie ?" questioned Honor, coming softly up to the chair and leaning over it.

"Yes, alone, Miss Craven," said the sick girl, her pale face brightening unspeakably as she raised it to the beautiful one above her. "The lady's servant is sitting in the front kitchen ; she always does. She says this one feels like a well, and—and, as they pay for it, she has the right to sit there."

"And have you given up the right to sit there too, Marie ?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Craven ; they pay for those rooms. But I do very well here."

"Marie, you remember telling me that you thought you could get a little money by designing for woolwork, but could only do it by working the pattern, not by drawing. Well, see here."

The parcel was brought from Honor's pocket, and the two girls' heads bent over its contents—the beautiful face whose suffering was all to come, and the worn one whose bitterest suffering was past.

For nearly half an hour Honor Craven sat in the little back-kitchen, cheering, by that half-hour, the girl's whole day, and giving her pleasant thoughts and memories to last her till the next time the bright voice should greet her from the open doorway. Then she rose to go.

"I am coming here oftener now, Marie," she said, giving her gentle little hand to the lame girl, as she would have done to any lady in the land. "I suppose your father will soon be in. You will not be alone much longer. How is ne getting on, Marie?"

"About the same, Miss Craven," replied the girl, feeling the reality of Honor's interest. "He has an order for the photograph at Abbotsmoor on Thursday, but he took only one likeness yesterday, and his room in Kinbury is expensive. Poor father!"

"Oh, he will soon get better now, Marie; never fear. I'm so glad it is he who is to take us at Abbotsmoor."

"It is through Sir Philip Somerson. I do not think Mrs. Trent would ever have thought of it. And father says Mr. Keith has ordered a picture, but whether that's through Sir Philip or not, he doesn't know."

It was of the old photographer that they were talking in the garden, when Honor joined them again, and found Royden Keith leaning against the open window beside which Mrs. Disbrowe lay, and Mrs. Payte and Phoebe sitting on the garden-seat without.

"It is a stupid idea altogether, I think," the little old lady was saying when Honor came quietly up and stood among them. "How can you have the picture complete without having Gabriel Myddelton in it, and who would care for a picture where *he* figured? Rubbish altogether, I call it, and Lady Lawrence is a senseless old woman to want it."

"Perhaps it would be possible," said Royden, with the flash of keen amusement which sometimes shone so swiftly in his steadfast, handsome eyes, "for Verrien to copy Gabriel Myddelton's picture first, and then arrange the head among the others, that the photograph might include him too."

"None of the others would sit in that case," observed Mrs. Payte, tersely.

"Why? Cowardice was his inheritance, not an acquired fault. What is your crest, Miss Craven?"

"A pair of heels," said Honor, smiling a little at her own inexplicable blush, "and the motto below is from the *Musarum Deliciae*. You know the lines—

"He that fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day!"

"The inheritance of cowardice," said Royden, smiling into her eyes. "And Gabriel's mother was a Craven. What is the legend of the crest?"

"Our earliest ancestor," said Honor, "once engaged in single combat, and when he found the fight going against him, saved his life in a paltry manner by crying 'Craven' before the sun went down. Knights were allowed in those days to end the fight so, to their dishonour."

"I call it a wise and prudent measure too," said Royden, as he turned to the sick lady within the room; "there are worse crimes in the world than crying 'Craven' before the sun goes down. Don't you think so, Mrs. Disbrowe?"

"Indeed I do," she answered, gently smiling as she met his gaze. ("It is a gaze I like to meet," she said to Mrs. Payte only that very morning, as they talked of Royden Keith.) "I wish I thought that was poor young Myddelton's only sin."

"He was a Myddelton. How could you expect him to be other than what he proved himself?" interrupted Mrs. Payte, contemptuously. "If he ever could turn out a good man, it would be now that he has forfeited his name and his riches. The hope of stepping into such a fortune has made others sin besides Gabriel Myddelton, and is making others sin, and *will* make others sin; and the possession of such wealth would spoil many a man, and woman too. It is beyond my power to imagine whom it would *not* spoil."

The sharp eyes under the broad hat went from Honor's face to Phoebe's and back again to Honor's, Mr. Keith following their gaze, still leaning idly there against the window, with the three dogs waiting at his feet.

It was the little old lady herself who broke the pause which followed her last words.

"I have a great wish to go to Abbotsmoor. I suppose I must pocket my pride and ask for an invitation."

"Will you go in my place, Mrs. Payte," cried Honor, impulsively, "and let me stay with Mrs. Disbrowe?"

"Now, Honor, how can you be so silly?" explained Phoebe. "You know how angry Lawrence would be."

"Will you," said Royden, turning his eyes quickly from Honor's vexed face, "let me drive you there, Mrs. Payte? I am invited to bring a friend; please to be that friend."

There was a little blunt demurring, but it was arranged nevertheless, and the old lady seemed as well contented as she ever seemed about anything.

They chatted a little longer, and then Royden prepared to go.

"What a beautiful fellow this greyhound is!" said Honor, laying her hand lightly on the glossy, dun-coloured head. "What is his name, Mr. Keith?"

"Lachne," he answered, as he offered her his hand; "that means the glossy-coated; and this little terrier is Leucos, which means grey; and this spaniel, Labro, which means furious. Can you remember after whose dogs mine are named?"

"Yes—Actæon's," she answered. "Have you fifty?"

"Only these three now," he said, rather gravely; "trusty old friends, whom I have had with me many years."

"And from whom you would not like to part, especially this beautiful greyhound?"

"No; I do not know what would tempt me voluntarily to part with Lachne."

From East Cottage, Royden Keith rode on to Kinbury, and, dismounting at the door of the hotel, gave his horse to his groom.

"She is tired enough," he said; "take her in, Edwards, and bring me round Robin Hood in half-an-hour's time."

"Saddled, sir?" inquired the groom, betraying a little of his astonishment; for had not his master been in the saddle almost since daybreak?

"Saddled, of course," returned Royden, as he mounted the hotel steps.

"I did not expect you back so soon, sir," said Pierce, following Mr. Keith to his private sitting-room; "you ordered dinner at eight. Will you lunch so late as this, sir?"

"I lunched three hours ago," said Royden, as he took his letters from the chimney-piece, with his back to the valet, who seemed stirred a little from his usual middle-aged gravity. "I lunched at The Towers. Send me a glass of wine, that is all."

Following the waiter, who, with the mathematical precision of waiters, set the wine and biscuits before Mr. Keith, came Pierce once more into his master's presence.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, making a show of removing the things, "but are all well at The Towers?"

"All well, thank you, Pierce."

"And everything going on as it should do, sir—as if you were there?"

"Just as it would if we were there," amended Royden, smiling at the man's real, though hidden, earnestness.

"You seemed to be summoned so hurriedly, sir, I thought."

"Not summoned at all," said Mr. Keith, as he poured himself a glass of sherry.

"No illness of—the lady's, sir?"

"No."

Royden put down his empty glass and took up another letter. The servant lingered still, but the solemn decorum of his face and manner hid the keen and anxious interest he felt in his master's answers.

"Leave those, Pierce," said Royden, looking up from the paper in his hand; "I am going out again in a few minutes."

"Riding again this evening, sir?"

"Riding again this evening—yes," he answered, smiling a little now. "But I am only going round the Abbotsmoor woods, and shall be back to dinner. Poor Princess is tired out, but Robin will be fresh and fleet."

"The dogs seem tired too, sir," said Pierce, wondering at the run their master had given them that day.

"Then they need not come; they shall make their own choice. N-o," mused Royden, slowly tearing the letter in his hand; "I will take Lachne only."

Pierce looked in vain for any apparent reason for this change of purpose.

"To save trouble, I suppose," he thought. "There's always a scene if he tries to leave the greyhound behind."

So Royden Keith, ten minutes afterwards, rode from Kinbury to find the answer to that doubt he had expressed at East Cottage—

"I do not know what would tempt me voluntarily to part with Lachne."

CHAPTER VII.

The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil, Count; civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion. *Much Ado about Nothing.*

MRS. PAYTE stood with the girls at the gate of East Cottage, watching Royden as he rode away.

"Do you like him, Phœbe?" she asked abruptly.

"He is very handsome," Phœbe acknowledged, in a tone of praise as warm as she ever bestowed on anyone save her guardian.

"*He's* not a man to go through life with his hands folded," remarked the old lady tersely. "Honor, why are you staring up the road? You won't call him handsome, I know—not you. Unless a man has languishing manners like Captain Trent's, and can look at you lackadaisically under his eyelids, and talk in a lazy whisper, *you* haven't much to say in his favour. Ah, I see why you were staring; here they come! Sound the trumpet, beat the drum! What a delightful conjunction! They remind me of Prior and Swift, who used to walk round the parks together—Prior to make himself fat; Swift to keep himself lean."

Honor's eyes had to come back from their distant gaze to see the two advancing figures, and then she turned to Phœbe with a smile.

"I declare I did not know," said the old lady, "that Lawrence Haughton and Hervey Trent were such close friends. What bond of union lies between them?"

"It must have been Hervey who joined Lawrence on the road," suggested Phœbe, "for I'm sure Lawrence would not overtake and join Hervey of his own accord."

"And pray why not?" inquired Mrs. Payte, sharply. "Would not Mr. Haughton like to be the means of benefiting a young man whose mind is peculiarly alive to good influences?"

Phœbe looked into the old lady's face, astonished, but never for more than a minute at a time did she trouble herself to study Mrs. Payte's moods.

The gentlemen came up to the gate just then, and stopped, with a look of pleasure as well as surprise: but

after that first moment, Honor could see that Lawrence was in one of his moods of smothered ill-humour.

"Walking home, are you?" said the old lady, her shrewd glance impeded by the brim of her ugly brown hat. "What enterprise! But I must stop you here. Look upon East Cottage as a half-way house—the travellers' rest—and when you leave, I will let you take your wards with you, Mr. Haughton. Now, Honor, run and order the tea-table to be brought out."

There was no hesitation in Hervey's mind about accepting the invitation, and, though Lawrence paused for a moment, he did not refuse.

"I like to have young people round me," observed Mrs. Payte, particularly addressing Hervey, as he threw himself languidly on the garden-seat; "it gives me life and vigour. As one grows old and feeble, one likes to study enviously the strength and energy of youth."

"Does one, Mrs. Payte?" inquired Captain Hervey, politely, as his lazy eyes rested on the small, wiry form before him. "I should have thought it would have bored one."

"Mr. Haughton, you must not bring your business face here, please; we do not want to make our wills, or draw up our marriage settlements—quite yet. We only want to fritter away an hour in nonsensical tea-drinking. Stupid, don't you think?"

"One wasted hour cannot signify very much," the lawyer answered indifferently.

"Perhaps not, only the difficulty to me is to determine which of our hours *are* wasted. Now, Selina?"

Mrs. Disbrowe rose from her seat in the window, for Honor had come for her, and had brought Hervey to carry the easy-chair. Mrs. Payte stopped in her own occupation to watch this proceeding, but afterwards made up for the lost time by extra snapping.

"She says she likes to have young people about," fretted Miss Owen aside to her cousin; "if so, why is she so cross?"

"Now, girls," cried the little old lady from her seat, "we are waiting for you. Go to your separate trays—Honor to the coffee, and you, Phœbe, to the tea. There will be a knight for each of you."

Mrs. Payte leaned back in her seat after this speech, and waited for the division of labour, watching almost as if she had an interest in it beyond what Theodora Trent called her "unwarrantable interference in everything."

"Hervey," said Honor, simply, "will you please to wait upon me?"

The sharp eyes of the brown hat went swiftly up to Lawrence Haughton's face, and the thin lips of this cross old lady stirred just a little at the corners.

"Mr. Haughton, I patronise your end of the table, and Phœbe's tea. I look upon coffee as a lingering poison for a bilious constitution like mine. Your vaunted air has done me no good so far."

Honor glanced at the real invalid, who never spoke of her ailments, and grew even more gentle in her attentions.

"Hervey," she said, "did not Mrs. Trent tell us last night that Lady Lawrence said Kinbury air would kill her?"

"I dare say," assented Hervey, languidly. "I rarely recollect what she says."

"In that particular matter, Lady Lawrence's opinion entirely coincides with mine, then," said the old lady, smiling graciously, in answer to Hervey's words, "though in other respects I fail to learn any good of her. You are more privileged, I presume; you are sure to hear the best points of her character."

"Then I should like to be told which are the worst," observed Mr. Haughton, bluntly.

"I suppose, Mr. Haughton," mused the old lady, as she sipped her tea, "that it is you who have the greater chance of her favour; you are so clever, and so well understand the value of money."

"It would be rather a dangerous thing for you, Lawrence," said Honor, when he turned to her. "Don't you remember Little, the miser? He saved forty thousand pounds, and when at last the doctor told him he must spend a little and take wine, he died in the act of drawing the first cork. How much better it would have been if he'd gone on saving, and left the wine alone!"

"You are a ridiculous child," snapped Mrs. Payte. "Mr. Haughton, will you kindly bring me another cup of tea from Phœbe?"

Phoebe had been gazing regretfully into his angry face, and perhaps the little old lady had noticed this. When tea was over, and Honor was again enlisting Hervey's aid for the invalid, Mrs. Payte managed to keep Lawrence on the seat beside her. Phoebe hovered about for a time, but she was so very coolly and persistently kept at arm's length that she was obliged to fall back and join Honor and Mrs. Disbrowe in the sitting-room.

"Captain Trent is exerting himself unusually," observed Mrs. Payte. "I suppose he will exert himself sufficiently to marry."

"I suppose so."

"Theodora Trent will make him an excellent wife," she continued, pushing her hat back a little, and smoothing her tiny gray curls, "and a stylish wife, which is all-important. That being the case, and their marriage a settled thing, I don't like to see him dancing attendance—I mean sauntering attendance—on Honor Craven."

A flame of fiercest scarlet rushed into Lawrence Haughton's face.

"And I am afraid," resumed the old lady, placidly, that the day of Hervey's marriage will be a heavy day for you. I have heard that Miss Trent is always received at The Larches with open arms."

"Pray whose arms are open to receive her?" inquired Lawrence, with undisguised scorn.

"Miss Haughton's, and, they say, Mr. Haughton's too; though he would not confess it for a thousand pounds."

"Why should I lie for a thousand pounds?"

"This is only what I have heard," explained the old lady, apparently anxious to impress this fact upon him; "you will excuse my mentioning it."

He bowed a sulky acceptance of her apology.

"There is no preventing idiotic things being said," he muttered. "I never believe a word I hear."

"Nor do I," returned the old lady, "not a word; and I know that some day I shall have the pleasure of offering my congratulations on your marriage with Phoebe—a nice lively girl, with plenty of smiles and agreeable sayings. I suppose, in the event of your inheriting old Myddelton's money, you would sell your practice, Mr. Haughton?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Payte had just answered by a smile full of sympathy, when the garden gate swung upon its hinges, and a cheery voice saluted the party.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Romer," called Mrs. Payte, in her brisk, shrill tones, "for my young visitors were just leaving me."

The Reverend Walter Romer, Rector of Statton (the village to which Deergrove and The Larches and East Cottage belonged), was a cordial, hearty old gentleman, who equally enjoyed tending his spiritual flock and farming his arable land; a practical farmer as well as a practical Christian; a man with a clear business head and a warm, unselfish heart; a man at once shrewd and frank; at once provident and generous; worldly in just those varied senses of the world in which it is safe for a good and upright pastor to be worldly, while this is the world in which his help is needed.

"I understood from my old clerk," he said, after his warm greeting all round, "that Mr. Keith was here."

"He only stopped for a few minutes as he rode past," explained Mrs. Payte, while more than one present noticed the frown gathering on Lawrence Haughton's brow. "What do you want with him, Mr. Romer? Wasn't he at church last Sunday?"

"Probably somewhere," returned the Rector, laughing, "listening to a better fellow than myself. No; the fact is, he was to have come out to-day for some fishing, and I wanted to ask what had prevented him. There was a freshet this morning of a couple of feet down the river, and I'm vexed he missed his sport."

"Are you?" questioned Mrs. Payte, in her quickest tones. "Do you mean to say now, Mr. Romer, that you understand that man?"

"Well, he emphatically does not wear his heart upon his sleeve. And yet I think—"

"What, Mr. Romer?"

It was Honor who put in the question gently, when he paused.

"That there is no inconsistency in his wearing the motto which belongs to his branch of the Keith family—*I own no nobility but the soul*—nobility enough, eh, Miss Honor?"

"Excuse me," put in the lawyer, chillily, "but how have you discovered his branch of the family, if, as you insinuate, he is a man who rigidly guards his own secrets?"

"Ah, *you* know him, I see, Haughton," smiled the Rector, "for that is his nature, and yet I did not assert it. My important discovery was made by very simple means—I read the motto on his seal. Well, and how is the garden going on, Mrs. Payte?"

"Every ripe apple gets stolen before I'm down in the morning."

"It is too bad," said the Rector, suppressing his laugh at the complaint for which he had been thoroughly prepared. "Everything always goes wrong with the garden, doesn't it, Mrs. Payte? The hens used to dig up the seeds, and eat the currants as they came."

"Every one," assented the little lady, promptly; "though I wrapped each bush in muslin like a ghost."

"And the birds ate all the cherries," continued the Rector, sympathisingly.

"Every cherry. The little thieves would come rushing out of the tree in my very face—whole regiments and boarding-schools. Yet look at Selina, throwing crumbs to them at this very moment, to defy me. A nice set *they* are to encourage—savage, selfish little creatures. You once watch them when you feed them, and I dare vow you'll never feed them again. A father will hop off with the family dinner from under the very nose of his hungry wife and children, and a grown-up daughter will snatch the bread and butter from between her old mother's very teeth. Bah! a nice race they are to befriend."

The Rector turned away to hide his laugh, wondering how any one who grumbled so persistently at everything under the sun could yet take such a keen, unwavering interest in the affairs of others.

"I must go in now," he said, "to have a chat with Mrs. Disbrowe, and then to see Marie, poor girl! I shall overtake you young people presently. What do you think of the weather, Haughton? Don't the clouds form rather too high? You smile at my anxiety, but if you'd a sprinkling of bank-notes lying out in a field, bound to lie there for a certain time, you would not relish the idea of rain and wind."

"Even without that simile, I understand your anxiety about your harvest, Mr. Romer," said Lawrence, coldly, as he stood at the gate waiting for Honor to return from bidding good-bye to Mrs. Disbrowe.

But when she came, all his scientific arrangements were knocked on the head. At the very last moment Hervey forestalled him, and took his place at Honor's side, as he could not have done if the girl herself had not purposely aided his design. But to walk apart with Phœbe, as Honor evidently had intended him to do, was an alternative which Lawrence Haughton did not for an instant entertain; he sauntered up to Honor's right, as Hervey staunchly kept his position on her left, and walked so, dropping now and then a crumb of conversation to Phœbe at his right hand, but chiefly watching surreptitiously the face upon his left, until the Rector overtook them, and with frank diplomacy, soon established himself in Lawrence Haughton's place beside his favourite. Then Phœbe's guardian fell moodily back beside her, and entertained her on the way home with blunt monosyllables only.

"I think," said the girl, when she had exhausted all her lively subjects of conversation, and still ransacked her brain for more, under the delusion that she was amusing her companion, "that Hervey Trent would rather be with Honor than with Theodora; and I think Honor likes him very much."

Rubbish! She is always laughing at him."

"Yes, I know," granted Phœbe, unwillingly; "but then that is all good-temperedly done and he does not mind a bit, although he always *does* lecture her when Mrs. Trent and Theodora are by. I don't know why they should go on in that way, nor how Honor can ever choose to walk with him, when she might walk with you, Lawrence."

If Phœbe had had any idea of the storm she had invoked, she would not have tripped quite so happily past her guardian when she reached The Larches at last; but Phœbe Owen was not gifted with the power of seeing below the surface in any single matter whatever.

Lawrence was ill—that fact appeared to be patent to Miss Haughton the moment she met her brother in the hall, as she invariably did; and Lawrence apparently found it less trouble to assent to this than to clear his gloomy brow, and

shake off the sullen silence which pressed upon him. Nothing at dinner pleased him, and nothing that was said elicited a smile, or even an amiable word.

"You are very poorly, I am afraid, Lawrence," fretted Jane pathetically; "I knew it would be so this morning when you took those mushrooms."

"It is your head, Lawrence, I can see," said Phœbe, softly; "I will fetch my eau-de-cologne."

"Nonsense!" cried Jane, authoritatively. "It is not the head, and I know what will do him more good."

But Phœbe had rushed off for her scent-bottle.

"Foolish girl," muttered Jane, following her stiffly; "as if I did not know best what is the matter with my own brother!"

"You never offer scent, or stimulant, or sympathy, Honor," said Lawrence, when they two were left; and now his tone, though vexed, was neither rough nor sullen. "Why don't you tell me what is the matter—as they do?"

"Don't they remind you," asked Honor, as she took a rosebud from one of the vases on the table, "of the shoemaker in *The Relapse*, who told Lord Foppington that he was mistaken in supposing his shoe pinched him?"

Lawrence laughed as if he had not been poorly.

"There is no deceiving those beautiful eyes of yours," he said. "Give me that rosebud; pin it in my coat yourself, and that will cure me."

But with the utmost care and deliberation she fastened it in her dress.

"There Lawrence, just drink this, and you'll be all right," said Jane, entering fussily with some mixture in a glass. "You ought to have come home early and nursed yourself; you are so neglectful of your health."

"I've read somewhere," remarked Honor, sedately, "of a young captain of Marines, who was shot in the arm in battle, and when he asked permission to go below to have it amputated, he apologised for leaving action for 'such a trivial occasion'; he was like Lawrence."

"Exactly," assented Jane and Phœbe in a breath, having heard the words, but being in much too great a fuss to notice the tone.

"For pity's sake, sit down, both of you!" cried Law-

rence, in sudden, inexplicable anger. "Take these womanish condiments away."

* * * * *

Captain Hervey Trent, all unconscious of any of Mr. Haughton's feelings towards him, pursued his way to Deergrove that evening, in a state of placid satisfaction, chiefly with himself, but, in a secondary degree, with one or two other people; and what he pondered as he went, was betrayed by a few words which even passed his lips as he opened the gate at Deergrove.

"I hope that when I and Theodora are married and settled here, Honor will still be living close by us—not married to Lawrence—detestable idea, that—but still living there, or equally near us. I shall take care always to be kind to her; she is troublesome, of course, but I don't object to taking a little trouble for her."

* * * * *

When her visitors had all left East Cottage, Mrs. Payte heaved a sigh which sounded very like an expression of relief; but still it was with her usual eager briskness that she questioned Mrs. Disbrowe on various speeches which she must very well have known were intended only for that lady's private ear.

"I guessed as much," she ejaculated, as complacently as if she had been drinking in a string of compliments. "I saw that Mr. Haughton was out of temper with me, and that Captain Trent was bored to death, and that that little Dutch-faced girl only stayed with me because her guardian did. And Honor Craven was disgusted with all I said to you."

"No!" put in the invalid anxiously.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Payte, with that shrewd glance of hers, which showed how hard it would be to deceive her. "She was whispering to you about me just before they went."

"She only said," answered the sick lady, with a smile of pleasant recollection, "she thought you did not mean your words to be hard and sharp, as—I said they were."

CHAPTER VIII.

Fortune brings in *some* boats that are not steered.
Cymbeline.

LEAVING Kinbury, Royden Keith rode along the high-road towards Abbotsmoor ; past the wall that skirted the park, and past the high hedge bordering the wood. Then he turned aside into a lane which ran at right angles with the highway and bordered the wood on the other side. He rode slowly here, not only because the lane was rough and deeply rutted, and Robin Hood of his own accord slackened his dainty steps, but apparently because Robin's master had no wish to hasten now.

He had ridden about a mile up the lane when he drew bridle, for he had come upon a solitary cottage just at a turning in the lane. The walls were propped, the thatch torn, and the windows patched with paper, but a curl of thin blue smoke from the broken chimney rose against the dark background of the Abbotsmoor woods, and Royden, seeing this, dismounted without a moment's hesitation. Fastening Robin to an alder-bush which grew beside the rickety garden-gate, he walked up to the door of this desolate-looking little dwelling, and knocked upon it with his riding-whip.

"It *has* been a comfortable dwelling," he said to himself. "Can all the cottages on the Abbotsmoor estate have been left to fall to ruin when they would, as this one has?"

There came no answer to his knock, but, just as he stepped back to assure himself again of the presence of smoke that should betoken human occupation, an old man came round the corner of the cottage, with a spade upon his shoulder. He had evidently been at work in the garden behind, and so had not heard Royden's summons.

"What is it?" he inquired, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you," said Royden, in his pleasant, high-bred tones, "a few questions about this cottage and its late tenants. If you will answer them for me, I shall feel very much obliged to you."

The man put down his spade, and leaned upon it as he stood. Royden, resting his arm upon the branch of a stunted apple-tree, looked towards the cottage door as if he

would rather have gone within, gloomy and desolaté as the place might be.

"Have you lived here long?" he asked, when he saw that he was expected to hold his interview there.

"I dunno what you call long," returned the old man, sulkily; "I've lived here better'n seven year—will that do ye?"

"You took the cottage, did you not, from a man named Territ?"

"Not I."

"Did you not? I understood he was living here about ten years ago. He was a miner, and he had a daughter named"——

"I know her name," put in the old man, scraping the sole of his boot upon the spade he held. "If that's all ye want, I can tell ye that—sir." The last word was added apparently against the speaker's will, as he glanced at the face and figure opposite him. "Her name was Margit. I've heerd of her. She married from this cottage, and went with her husband to the county town. I've heerd nothin' of her since then. What should I hear, if she's a respectable 'ooman, and stays at home?"

"Then you did not know either of them personally?"

"Not I."

"Do you happen to know the name of Margaret's husband?"

"No—I never heerd it. That's a fine dog o' yourn, sir—fleet as the wind, I'll warrant. No, I don't trouble about my neebors' names—not I. Margit married a town chap, and I know none o' them. Is there anythin' more you'd care to ask?" added the old man, still gazing critically at the greyhound, which sat waiting at his master's feet.

"Margaret's father—is he dead?"

"Dead! Years and years ago. A fine horse that at the gate, sir—is it your'n?"

"Yes, it is mine," said Royden, pleasantly; "but, before I mount him, just let me look round your cottage kitchen, will you?"

"Ye're welcome," said the old man, in anything but a gracious tone. "There's naught to see in there, but, if ye like to take the trouble, why, ye can."

Saying this, he stuck his spade in the soil among his cabbages, and opened the door of the cottage.

Desolate as the little dwelling had looked from without, it was far more desolate, to Royden's eyes, within. Everything bore evidence of poverty, and nothing breathed the presence of a woman's care or thrift. But whether it was only of this that Royden was thinking, as he stood and looked round the bare and gloomy kitchen, no one could judge.

"The door leading into the garden at the back, you have fastened up, I see."

The old man glanced with rude astonishment up into the grave, dark face.

"You know the place, then, do ye?"

"From hearsay," was the quiet answer; "I have heard of this cottage, of course. Who that has heard of old Mr. Myddelton's murder has not heard of this cottage of Territ's?"

"Ah, sure, it was talked a deal of at the time, I s'pose?"

"Gabriel Myddelton"—the visitor was slowly treading the cottage floor as he spoke—"threw out there, they say, the water in which he washed his hands after the murder, and in the fire there he threw his wristbands stained with blood. I see. You do not happen to know, I suppose, where he hid his coat?"

"Lor' bless me, what should I know of such things?" ejaculated the old man, with a pious horror of the subject. "I'd do better to forget that any murderer was ever in here at all. I didn't ever trouble to ask where the coat was found, or anythin' of the kind, not I."

"It was Margaret, I believe, who hid it, but I have never heard whether it was she or her father who brought it to light."

"Maybe, maybe," returned the old man, absently; "I never troubled to question anythin' about it. Girls are great ijjits sometimes. She may a-wanted to screen that young Myddelton; but I dunno—I dnnno."

Royden was leaning against the rickety little table in the centre of the kitchen, his eyes bent upon the small wood-fire, his face full of deep thought, and one hand resting absently on the greyhound's head. The old labourer stood watching him with a puzzled scrutiny. No figure like this

had ever stood with him before upon his cottage hearth, and the very novelty of it worried him.

"He don't take on impident," he thought to himself, "nor he don't attempt preachin' and such like, but I don't see any good comin' here pokin' into that old murder that everybody's forgotten. That's a fine dog, though—there's no doubt about *him*."

Judging by the stress the old man laid upon the last pronoun, there did exist a doubt about the dog's master, who rose now from his easy position, and turned his eyes from the fire with an appearance of having suddenly awakened to the present from some long thought which had held him.

"Thank you," he said, offering his hand to the astonished occupant of this comfortless dwelling; "I have wanted to see this cottage ever since I heard the story of the murder. There is very little to see, as you said; still, I'm much obliged to you for showing it. Good night."

Quietly, and even unobserved by the old man's watchful eyes, he put a sovereign down upon the table, then re-trod the rough little garden-path, and mounted Robin.

"A nice evening, sir; you'll have a pleasant ride."

The old labourer had not seen the sovereign, yet his tone was changed. It was even respectful, though he could not have told what it was in his visitor which had caused this involuntary change. Royden did not notice it. Touching his hat kindly, in answer to the old man's awkward bow, he rode on up the lane at a trot.

No other cottage, and no other human being, came into sight, until a mile further on, he reached a stile over which a woman was climbing, with a heavy sheaf of wheat upon her head and a baby in her arms. Royden waited until she came down the lane and turned to go his way; then he spoke.

"You are heavily-laden to-night. Let me carry the little one as far as we are going on the same way."

He took the child and made her snug before him on the beautiful black horse, while the mother watched him, looking half afraid, until she saw the proud delight of the little girl so safely held in her grand position.

"You have been gleaning, of course?" said Royden making his horse's steps suit the pace of the tired mother.

"Yes, sir."

A little pause. Royden's motive in talking was not to pass the time away, but to make the wisest use of it.

"I have just been," he said, breaking the pause as soon as he could, "to that ruinous cottage on the outskirts of the Abbotsmoor woods ; do you know it ? The Territs used to live there—a miner and his daughter, who made themselves well known at the time of old Mr. Myddelton's murder."

"I remember, sir," replied the woman, respectfully ; "at least, I remember a little about it. Margaret Territ married just after ; but I needn't tell you that, sir ; those who know about the murder—at any rate, about the escape—must know about Margaret's marriage."

"Is her husband living now ?"

"No, sir ; at least, I oughtn't to say even that for certain, for I only know what my ears pick up by chance. Margaret's living somewhere in this very neighbourhood now, sir, I believe. I've never seen her, but I've heard she came back here some bit ago as a widow. It may be many miles off that she is, but I don't know ; people talk about her as if she was somewhere round about here."

"You are sure she is a widow ?" questioned Royden.

"They said so, sir, when she came ; that's all I know."

"You do not really belong to this part, I suppose—I mean, you have not lived here all your life ?"

"No, sir, only since my marriage, four years ago. I come from Wales, but my husband has always lived here, and *he* knows no more about the Territs than I do. The old man was hurt in a mine, and was a long time dying. I can't tell you why Margaret should have come back to live here. She was left a widow with just enough to live upon."

"And you cannot tell me what her husband's name was ?" queried Royden.

"No, indeed I can't, sir ; and I don't know who can. It never seems to have been let out, or else it was never cared about. That's our cottage, sir, across the field, and we turn up here. Thank you kindly."

She took the little girl from Royden's arms and went on her way, the child crying to go back, and the mother soothing her ; while Royden rode quickly on, crossing meadows, and following lanes, until he had left Abbotsmoor miles behind, and found himself on a small rugged heath.

"I ought," he mused, glancing around him, "to be able to get back to Kinbury without retracing the way I have come. How will it be? Kinbury lies over there, due east, so if I cut off a corner of the heath and push straight on, I can hardly miss my way, though I must necessarily be late."

When he had cut off the corner of the heath, he stopped in surprise. At this spot two high hedge-rows ended abruptly, and between them the grass grew rank and untrodden. A narrow, hedged-in strip of scanty pasture-land it might have been, but Royden's quick eye detected at once that this had been a lane. Was it passable now?

Just then he caught sight of a man crossing the heath at a little distance, and riding up to him, he questioned him.

He was a farmer, young and well to do, but he spoke in a tone of quiet respect as he glanced with shrewd criticism at horse and rider.

"I'm almost a stranger here myself," he said, "but I have heard these lanes spoken of as impassable. When the line to the mine was cut, it made those old lanes useless, so new roads were made, and those bye-ways have been allowed to run to seed, as you see. I don't think I would attempt them, if I were you; you want a stiff north-country pony for such an experiment, not such a horse as that.

"Thank you, but I think I will try," said Royden.

"Pure perverseness," muttered the farmer, left to his solitary walk again. "He's sure to have to turn back."

Along that grass-grown track between the high hedge-rows Royden rode, the steps of his young horse constantly impeded, and its head tossed impatiently under this unusual treatment.

"Where can we be?"

The exclamation broke from Royden when, after half-an-hour's slow riding, he reached a chained but broken gate which stretched like a terminus across the rough, forgotten way. Robin, at all events, could not pass this barrier.

"The question is," mused Royden, "can I venture to leave him here for a time, or must I turn now? I would rather go on, if I could, and see if there is any cottage hereabouts where they remember——"

The thought was broken by a rustling in the hedge, and presently there emerged into the lane a ragged, hatless

lad, with a look in his bright eyes, half of fear and half of defiance.

"Trespassing!" said Royden, looking coolly down upon him. "What are you going to do with the nuts?"

"Nuts, sir!" the lad echoed, with the innocent look of one well versed in falsehood. "What nuts?"

"These," said Royden, touching with his riding-whip one after another of the pockets which bulged from the lad's shabby garments.

"Oh, those," said the boy, brought sturdily to bay, "mother 'll sell 'em."

"What will your mother get for a handful—sixpence?"

"Bless ye, no, sir; threepence, maybe."

"Well, I will give you sixpence for the first handful, and you shall see how cleverly my dog can crack and eat them."

To the boy, grasping his sixpence in one hand and supplying with the other the nuts which Lachne cracked, those ten minutes were minutes of perfect enjoyment; but they faded into insignificance when the crowning joy was given.

"If I tie my horse to this gate," said Royden, suiting the action to his words in his prompt, cool way, "can you watch and take care of him till I come back? Don't come too near him—he isn't used to little lads; but you've watched a horse before now, I daresay, and, if you do it well this time, I have some loose shillings in my pocket which may find their way into yours."

The boy's eyes brightened under his shaggy hair.

"Yes, sir; I've tended horses afore now, sir," he said, with a friendly nod. "Will you take the dog, sir?"

"He will do as he likes," said Royden, as he climbed the gate and walked on.

But the boy's doubt was soon settled, for the greyhound darted over the gate, and was close beside his master in a moment.

Through two or three fields Royden had walked, when he found himself in a small three-cornered patch of meadow, shut in entirely by two hedges and the embankment of that single railway line to the mines, which was the cause of the way being so neglected and forsaken.

"Will there be a little nook beyond the line," questioned Royden to himself, "or does it open presently to the high-

way? I suppose I had better not go on from here this evening. Ah!—great Heaven!”

For, before his eyes, a child sat on the high embankment. its figure clearly outlined against the evening sky, and in his ears the panting of a fast-approaching engine sounded with a deafening portent. Where was it? Which way was the train coming? How far away was it? How soon would it rush over the spot on which his eyes were fastened too eagerly for him to see aught else? Soon—in one minute perhaps, it might be. The sight of the great engine would give the child one awful moment of panic, in which it would be helpless in its horror; then the train would pass on, and there would be no child sitting there against the evening light, but scattered on the rails——

A thousand impossibilities darted into Royden's mind, as he stood and saw the child playing there in its utter unconsciousness, while Death came rushing on; a thousand possibilities, while below all, was the awful consciousness that human aid was powerless here. But, for all that, it was only through one breathless second that he stood thus. In the next he was again the man who had faced danger and death too often to be made a woman by it, even when it came in such a form as this and he knew that his own arm was powerless to help or stay it.

His resolution was as swift as thought. One quick, low whistle, a swift, firm gesture of his hand, a keen, eager look upon his face, which the intelligent eyes that watched it seemed to understand—then Royden stood alone; and the greyhound—literally now “fleet as the wind”—sped across the field, and up the embankment. The impulse of the child, as the animal darted up to him, was to fly in the opposite direction, and this saved him; for in one instant he had fallen down the steep embankment on the opposite side of the line to that up which Lachne had sprung. To have seen the mighty, panting engine bearing down upon him would have paralysed the child in every limb; to see the hound rush towards him gave him just the terror which urged flight, and he had fallen before the train rolled past. Royden's eyes were strong and fearless, and had looked on death close and bravely more than once; but there glistened something womanish on their lashes when he stood upon the

line, and saw something scattered there, which bore no likeness now to the greyhound which for years had kept as faithfully beside his master as he had kept that day.

Royden murmured no words of praise or pity as he stood looking down upon these ghastly fragments ; and, keenly as he mourned his favourite, there rose no bitter query in his mind, " Had the life of a neglected child been worth this sacrifice ? " There are some minds in which such questions never can have birth.

Royden turned away with one deep, quiet sigh, stifling the memories of old days through which this dog had been his only companion, a faithful and a constant one, always watchful and always true. His care was wanted now for the child whom Lachne's death had saved. So, struggling bravely with his thoughts, while his heart was heavy, Royden lifted the unconscious child, a boy of five or six years old, and saw a deep cut across his low, brown forehead, and one lock of fair hair lying upon it stained with blood. Tenderly—almost as if the strong arms had been used to such a task—Royden carried him to where, about a hundred yards away, a cottage stood alone under a giant poplar. As he approached it he saw that a woman was standing shrinkingly against the wall, gazing at him with a kind of vacant terror as he advanced.

" Can you," asked Royden, wondering at the expression on the woman's handsome, care-lined face, " direct me to the home of this child ? He has had a fall, and I want to leave him with his mother."

The woman raised both hands, and touched the child very gently, but she did not move her eyes from Royden's face—so full of grave and quiet kindness then.

" Your child ? " he asked, pitifully, as he watched her. " I am very glad ; and, if this is your home, let us go in."

" I saw," she said, still without moving, " but I could not stir. I could not run. I could not even pray. I saw him sitting there, and the engine coming—coming—close upon him. Then I saw him—saved ! This scratch"—laying her finger softly on the cut—" is nothing to me, because in that one awful moment, I saw him—dead !"

" Come," said Royden, gently, but not offering now to give the child to her ; " we want warm water to bathe his face."

It was he, though, who led the way into the cottage, and when the mother had followed him in, she only fell on her knees beside the little cotton-covered couch on which Royden had tenderly laid down the child.

"I saw it," she cried again, laying a soft brown hand upon the boy's cut forehead, as if to hide the stains she would not yet remove. "I saw death rushing to seize my child, and then I saw him—saved!"

Gently Royden touched her on the shoulder, and told her what few mothers would have required to be told.

"It is not want of love," he whispered to himself. "Poor thing—poor mother! Will solitude work this, or has it been a shock?"

For a whole hour he waited with the mother and her child—her only one, that fact was plain to him without a word; her only one, and she a widow. Then he rose to go, for the little boy was sleeping calmly, with a soft bandage round his head, and the mother's wide and puzzled eyes had found the blest relief of tears.

"There are one or two things that I want to borrow of you," said Royden then, "and a few feet of your waste ground."

She understood in a moment, and through the next hour's bitter work she helped him almost as efficiently, and quite as silently, as a man could have done.

"Such sights as this would make most women shrink and faint," thought Royden, "but not this woman. Can her dim eyes have looked on such a sight before?"

"Thank you for all your help," he said, aloud, "and for that quiet spot you chose for my dog's grave. I will come again some day to see the little lad. He will soon be all right, and I fancy he will never again push his way through difficulties and obstacles up to the railway-line."

"Never again," the woman returned, in her dreamy way, her undrooping, vacant eyes still fixed upon Royden as he stood in the low cottage kitchen. "I have not thanked you yet," she faltered, "I—cannot."

"Your thanks are due elsewhere," said Royden, gently, "not to me."

A few minutes more he lingered, hardly liking even yet to leave her in her sorrow and loneliness; and then—for

the first time since he had seen the child's unconscious figure sitting against the evening light, while he heard the panting engine close upon it—there rushed back into his mind the motive of this search of his.

"I have been to-night," he said, "to that cottage beyond the Abbotsmoor woods, where Territ the miner used to live. He had a daughter, I believe. Do you happen to remember them at all?"

"No, no."

The woman's answer came clear and quick, and her eyes grew startled in their unmoved gaze.

"Do you not? I am particularly anxious to meet with some trace of this girl—girl I say, but I am thinking of what she must have been ten years ago. She is a woman of thirty now, I should think."

No answer, and Royden went on, his gaze a little more intent, his thoughts awaking to suspicion.

"You do not happen, you say, to have heard where she lives now, or even her name?"

"No, no."

"Can you tell me whether the Christian name of any of you neighbours is Margaret? It would help me if you could tell me even so little as that."

Her startled gaze deepened a little, her lips shook even as she compressed them firmly, her hands were locked before her as if the tension gave her strength to stand.

"I have no neighbours."

"Thank you, then it is useless to ask you more." Royden said this very quietly, but a shrewd ear would have detected the undertone. "Good-bye," he added, and his eyes were kind in their gaze, and hid the thoughts that lay below.

The woman stood quite still for a few minutes after he had left, and then she turned with a shiver to the fire, murmuring the name to herself again and again.

"Margaret Territ!—Margaret Territ! What should he want with her—with Margaret? She died—many years ago—ten years ago—quite suddenly she died, on the day of that trial. He was guilty of murder, they said. Ah, that was a double murder! No wonder she died—poor Margaret!"

The simple dreamy smile with which she had been looking down upon her sleeping child gave place to one which,

swiftly as it sped, looked pitifully out of character upon the worn face—a smile of caution which amounted to cunning.

“He saved my child—I remember that; but—he shouldn’t have spoken of Margaret.”

On the strip of carpet on her hearth, with her chin in her palms and her eyes upon the fire, the woman sat for more than an hour, buried so deeply in thought, that when, at last, the child awoke, and roused her with its sudden cry, she sprang to her feet with a shriek of fear, and gazed in horror round the cottage walls.

CHAPTER IX.

Friend or brother,
He forfeits his own blood that spills another.

It was the day of the Abbotsmoor pic-nic, and Phœbe Owen, with a care-encumbered expression of countenance, added the finishing touches to her elaborate toilette.

“I don’t know how it is,” she fretted, looking at herself in the glass as she put on her tall hat with its pink roses and blue feathers, “but whatever way I do my hair I always look the same. I learned this new way from Theodora, and it doesn’t make me look any better—does it, Honor?”

Thus appealed to, Honor answered, with pleasant rashness, that it was not at all a good thing for girls to be altered by the way they did their hair; and then she put her head gravely on one side, to criticise the plump little figure which she had so patiently and brightly assisted to adorn.

“Well,” inquired Phœbe, anxiously, “what will they think of it?”

“I can imagine the Rector’s eyes when he says, ‘Phœbe, my dear, what a very *secular* costume!’”

“You are always laughing, and seeming as if you weren’t, Honor,” said Phœbe, pettishly. But for all that, now that the arduous performance was over, and she could see the startling *tout ensemble* in the glass, her own lips broke into a gratified smile. “Lawrence will see that I have made the most of the money he gave me, won’t he, Honor?”

“Indeed he will; but I must run off. Think of me

here in my dressing-gown at five-and-twenty minutes past twelve, and Lawrence ordered the waggonette for half-past!"

"But, you see," put in Phœbe, unwilling even yet for her cousin to go, "Lawrence will wait for you and not be angry, and he makes such a fuss if I am late. Is Jane ready?—and how does she look?"

"Very nice," replied Honor, shortly, for she never would allow any of Phœbe's spiteful remarks on Miss Haughton's personal appearance. Hard and suspicious as Jane Haughton might be to her young kinswoman, this young kinswoman, on whom nature had lavished her fairest gifts, had never a word to say against Jane's appearance.

"In her temper, I mean," explained Phœbe. "There's Lawrence calling! Here we are, Lawrence!" she cried, rushing past Honor and down the stairs. "At least here I am, and Honor won't be a minute."

Without even a thought for Phœbe's selfishness, Honor ran lightly into her own room, and five minutes afterwards sprang down the last few steps into the hall, alighting unexpectedly beside Lawrence as he paced to and fro waiting for her.

"Oh! Lawrence, I did not see you! I fancied you would be fuming on the box of the waggonette."

"I chose to fume here instead," said Lawrence, trying to assume a sternness which he could not feel while she stood beside him in her bright and girlish beauty. "Sit on the box beside me, Honor, and the man and the hamper shall go inside."

With only a slight shake of the head for answer, Honor stepped up into the waggonette, and Mr. Haughton followed her, to Phœbe's great delight.

"I thought you were going to drive," remarked Jane.

"No," he answered, curtly. "Take the reins, Hare."

It was scarcely half-an-hour's drive from The Larches to Abbotsmoor, yet the waggonette was the last vehicle which drew up before the empty mansion, where all the guests were gathered, some dismounting and others standing about. There was Theodora, resplendent in green and white grenadine, lingering near the dog-cart, from which Royden Keith was assisting little Mrs. Payte to alight. There was the jovial Rector, waking the sleeping echoes of the

place with his hearty laugh, while his comely wife went in and out among the party, dispensing sage but unheeded advice on the subject of hampers. There was Captain Trent, sauntering to and fro, and vouchsafing languid instructions to the men-servants from Deergrove. There was Mrs. Trent, in heavy bronze-coloured silk, making strenuous use of her eyes and fan. There was Lady Somerson, courteously apologising for the absence of Sir Philip, and making herself quietly and unobtrusively pleasant, as high-bred ladies sometimes do. There was Pierce, in possession of a huge luncheon basket; and there was little Monsieur Verrien, arranging his camera in front of the house, and weighed down by a greater amount of anxiety than pressed upon the rest of the company conjointly.

"The photograph must be taken first," asserted Miss Trent. "Who will fetch Monsieur Verrien?"

Monsieur Verrien came up, and began at once the "business" of his day.

"Pardon, mesdames et messieurs," he said, accosting the whole party in a vague, nervous way, "but did Lady Lawrence say she would have the facade with the group?"

"Yes, the facade with the family clustered there."

"Thanks, monsieur. And now will you kindly tell me whom I am to take?"

He had happened now to address Lady Somerson, and she drew back smiling.

"Almost everyone but myself," she said.

His speech passed on to the next lady, little Mrs. Payte, in her broad brown hat and old-fashioned alpaca dress.

"Not me. Bless the man, does he think the whole neighbourhood is peopled by old Myddelton's kindred?"

"He is a foreigner," explained Lady Somerson, gently, "and almost a stranger here."

"Oh! I know all about him," said the small old lady, with a grunt which greatly amused some of the bystanders; "but I wish somebody would put it to him in his native tongue that Lady Lawrence, whoever she may be, did not ask for *my* portrait."

Again the little photographer's question passed on, and this time was intercepted by Royden Keith, who shook his head and smiled.

"No, monsieur," he said, in his courteous way ; "I too must be left out of your picture."

"You don't scorn the idea of being one of our family quite as Mrs. Payte did," remarked Theodora.

He stood back, watching the little Frenchman arrange his group, and Mrs. Payte, chatting volubly all the time, took up her station near him. Lady Somerson and the Rector stood nearer the photographer, apparently more interested.

"Theodora Trent looks very well in that position," remarked Mrs. Payte, her shrewd eyes glistening as she watched the preparation for the photograph, "and she knows it."

It was at that moment, as Verrien walked back towards his camera, that Theodora, with a smiling glance, beckoned to Royden that she wanted him. Mrs. Payte looked sharply up into his face, and saw him shake his head and bow.

"How kind of her !" she said, feelingly. "She would have you in the photograph, if possible. It will make a hideous picture," she continued, presently, with a placid enjoyment of her idea. "Look at Hervey Trent's lackadaisical attitude, and Mr. Haughton's assumption of careless ease. That blue fabric on Phoebe's head will come out as a huge white blemish ; and just notice the amount of space Theodora's skirts occupy. Lady Lawrence will know a great deal about them from that photograph, won't she ? How is she to know, for instance, that Miss Trent made all the arrangements to suit herself, and that Honor Craven, standing so prettily there against the house, is laughing the whole notion of the thing to scorn ? Bah ! I have no patience with any of them !"

"So I see, Mrs. Payte," said Royden, laughing. "Perhaps, if you had the patience, the picture would not seem quite so hideous."

"May be. For goodness sake, let us walk about till that farce is over."

They had strolled quite half a mile from the house, when Royden gave an imperceptible start and stood still.

"This is— I have heard of this oak," he said, as they stopped before a splendid oak-tree, on the outskirts of the park.

Mrs. Payte looked up into his face, and then higher, among the branches of the oak.

"Of course," she returned, sharply; "everything about old Myddelton's place has been well talked of."

"This tree must be a thousand years old," Royden continued, moving nearer, "and it is hollow."

"How quick you are!" observed the old lady, as she tripped round the tree. "You spoke before you had seen the opening."

She was stopping then in front of an aperture four or five feet high, and a couple of feet wide.

"What a huge trunk!" she said, looking in over the foot of bark which still remained, and formed a kind of stile to the entrance of the cavity. "This hollow would dine a dozen people. I like to see these old trees on an old estate; but I don't like this estate; do you, Mr. Keith?"

"I should," replied Royden, walking quietly on, at the little lady's side, "if I could see it utilized and beautified; with a man's hand and heart at work about it, and a woman's bright, sweet presence."

"Can you fancy it?"

"Yes."

"Bah!" said the old lady, answering brusquely Royden's quiet word. "How can old Myddelton's money cause anything but evil, when we remember how it was garnered?"

"Very easily," returned Royden, gazing on the empty house which lay before them. "Can we possibly hold that heathenish idea of there being a curse on old Myddelton's money? Do you believe that his wealth, if well and humbly used—would not do the good that other money could; and—if, as I said, nobly and generously used—return in blessings on the giver!"

"No—old Myddelton's," opposed Mrs. Payte, sturdily. "I remember once reading an epitaph which run in this way—

"That I spent, that I had;
That I gave, that I have;
That I left, that I lost.

so you see how old Myddelton managed. He spent little, so he had little; he gave none, so he has none; and he left much, so he lost mightily. How I hate the very idea of wealth when I think of it! See, they are beckoning us. Dinner, I suppose—always the key-note of a picnic!"

The cloths were spread in the shade of the avenue trees,

under which a merry group had gathered when Royden and Mrs. Payte came up.

The photograph was taken, and now there was nothing more for them to do but to enjoy themselves just in their own idle way, and, first of all, by lingering over the meal, for which everyone was ready. Theodora's management of her own personal affairs was, as usual, excellent, and, viewed from *her* stand-point, thoroughly successful. She took her seat between Royden Keith and Hervey Trent, and was waited upon to her heart's content. Whether all the others fared as well, signified very little indeed to her.

Phœbe never did succeed in her mild diplomacy, so it was no surprise to her to find herself at a quite impassable distance from her guardian, who was assiduously waiting on Honor, and chafing very visibly at Honor's reception of his service. Captain Trent, too, dovetailed in his mild attentions, but these Honor received with equally careless composure. It was a rather difficult part to play, this of Captain Hervey's. With Miss Trent's presence and requirements so persistently asserted, and her eyes seldom letting any one of his acts escape them, his straying inclinations were somewhat difficult of accomplishment.

Whatever Royden's part might have been, he played it with perfect ease, sometimes humorously, but at all times quietly and easily. He had stories to tell now and then, short and pithy experiences, which, though his own, never contained repetition of the objectionable personal pronoun. So well he told them, too, that even those—and there were more than one—who wished to slight them and him, could not do so; they were drawn against their wills to listen to his stories. So well he told them—his voice perfectly grave, and no smile stirring his lips, though his eyes might be full of fun—that he never was interrupted, to the ruin of the story, or had to shorten it ignominiously. But once he made a sudden pause, and finished abruptly.

"That wasn't the real end of the adventure, Mr. Keith," said Theodora, excitedly. "Please don't imagine that you can take us in so easily."

"You are wise, Mr. Keith," Mrs. Payte remarked. "In this place and this company, you never intended to intrude

a touching episode, though I do believe you would tell that even better. What is it you have there, Miss Trent ? ”

Theodora had looked with such unutterable insolence at the old lady during her interruption, that everyone felt a little startled by the cool conclusion being addressed particularly to her.

“ *Tartelettes au fromage à la crème*,” replied Theodora, with languid frigidity.

“ Good to eat ? ”

Theodora passed the dish back to the footman behind her without deigning a reply. But the glance, intended, as it was, for utter annihilation, missed its aim.

“ In our young days, Mrs. Payte,” put in the Rector classing himself genially with the old lady of threescore years and ten, “ we had not found out the vast advantages of those French abbreviations.”

“ Abbreviations ! Is *gelée au vin* an abbreviation of ‘ jelly ’ ? Pooh ! in my young days we called a spade a spade, and we called affection, folly.”

Except that the sayings of such a small and meanly-clad old lady must necessarily be vulgar in the extreme, and below the notice of refined and elegant minds, this suggestive speech would have met with a crushing retort from Miss Trent ; but, being so, it was only consigned to a deserved oblivion, and Theodora graciously continued her efforts at entertainment. But at intervals during the day she relieved herself by wondering why that common and sour-tempered little being should ever have been allowed to come among them ; but was always on her guard as to the recipient of this wonder, because she was perfectly aware in whose escort she had arrived.

“ Hervey, my dear,” observed Mrs. Trent, aside to her nephew, before they separated after dinner, “ the more Theodora shows her dislike to that chattering old person, the more Honor Craven chats with her. You should tell the girl what bad taste this shows ; she will desist then.”

Acting complacently on this suggestion, Captain Trent, not at all unwillingly, drew Honor aside to speak seriously to her.

“ Thank you, Hervey,” she said. “ How good it is of you to think of these things even at a pic-nic ! ”

Hervey told her graciously that of course he always thought of "these things," and then had the mortification of seeing her escape from him as swiftly as possible, and straightway join a group in which the obnoxious old lady was a prominent figure.

"Now we are going over the house."

Two or three voices said it at once, and a general move was made. Jane Haughton rose and shook the crumbs from her lap, heaving a sigh over the abundant remnants of the feast. Pierce, who during the dinner had been worth two or three of the other men put together, was quietly waiting on one solitary man who dined among the avenue trees at a little distance.

"Will he repack his hamper or waste it? All the nicest things here are what Mr. Keith brought. Silly extravagance!"

With her mind under this pressure, Jane Haughton put up her parasol, and moved stolidly forward, as one prepared to do her duty by viewing the house. Honor ran up at this moment and joined the group.

"Where have you been?" inquired Jane.

"Only talking to Monsieur Verrien. I said he could go over the house, too, as it was open. He would like to see the pictures."

"He can go with the servants when we have been," remarked Theodora, coldly.

"Suppose we make an arrangement," proposed the Rector, "and then we needn't feel dependent on each other. We meet here—is it not so?—at six o'clock, for tea, and for our start homewards."

"Not homewards," put in Theodora, taking the words from Mrs. Trent. "You are coming to Deergrove then, please; we want to finish the day with a dance. You all promise to come?"

The "all" was uttered certainly, but it was only to Royden Keith that she chanced to turn just in that interrogatory pause. He did not seem to notice this, and the general acceptance of Theodora's invitation was hearty enough. Mrs. Payte, who certainly had not been particularly addressed, even if included, thanked Miss Trent in a very marked manner, and expressed herself as most happy.

"Have you a licence to shoot over the Abbotsmoor estate, Mr. Keith?" asked Honor, as they walked on.

"Yes"

"The steward is a niggardly fellow," put in Lawrence Haughton. "How do you think he served me last year? He sent me a present of game—a brace of birds and a hare, I think—and I, of course, sent him a note of thanks. A few months afterwards, he came to me to settle a little private matter of his, by law, and when he received my bill he brought it to me, entreating me to remember the game. I did, and let the bill go. In another month he sent me a bill of this game by a man who was to wait for payment."

"What did you do?" inquired Mr. Keith, laughing.

"While his man waited, I sent a clerk to his house with my bill to wait for payment."

"You were quite equal to the occasion," remarked Honor, turning to join another group.

"How horribly dismal it looks!" cried Plœbe, pausing on the threshold of the great, echoing hall. "I daren't venture in without some strong escort. Lawrence, will you take me through?"

He took her in, and returned to join Honor.

So instinctively she shrank from him, that, noticing it herself, she tried to laugh off the gesture of repugnance.

"I am a real Craven," she said: "I must hover in the Rector's protection."

And, to Mr. Romer's intense amusement, she kept beside him through all the dusty rooms and staircases, on which the cobwebs hung as thickly as the leaves hung upon the ancient trees without. But, in spite of her words, Honor had no shadow of craven fear within her inquisitive eyes.

They reached the portrait-gallery at last, but found it difficult to examine and criticise the pictures until they became accustomed to the heavy semi-light.

"Mrs. Payte," said Honor, leaving the Rector now, and linking her arm in that of the small old lady, "you have never seen the pictures before. Come and let me show you Gabriel Myddelton."

They stood before the portrait for a few minutes in silence, and by that time the others had joined them; all anxious, it would seem, to examine this one picture.

"What a young face it is!" said Lady Somerson. "This portrait must have been taken some time before he quarrelled with his uncle."

"The date is 1860," read Lawrence. "That was one year before the murder. He was nineteen then."

"It is a handsome face," observed Mrs. Payte, her hat pushed back, and her head elevated that she might get a good look at the picture; "but I thought that Gabriel Myddelton was fairer—more, for instance, like Captain Trent."

"No," said Lady Somerson; "he was dark. A little more like—Mr. Keith, only not so tall, nor so finely built, nor so—handsome."

"Or, rather, not so old," put in Royden, laughing, as he frankly met her scrutinising gaze. "Mr. Haughton, I have never heard how Gabriel Myddelton escaped from gaol."

"Have you not?" remarked Lawrence, haughtily, ignoring the evident question put to him.

"Will you kindly tell me?"

"The escape was managed by the girl whose evidence had gone to hang him, and by her lover, who, as ill fate would have it, was warder in the county gaol."

"As ill fate would have it. Yes?" said Royden, with a curious tone in the question, half of scorn and half of amusement.

"The man got admission for the girl to see Myddelton," put in Mr. Romer, noticing Mr. Haughton's surliness, "and she passed into the condemned cell in profuse tears. She was seen to walk out to the dog-cart that waited for her, and then to pass back again, and out again. There was a confused account of these passages to and fro, as if the gaolers had been off their guard, taking little heed of her in her tears. At any rate, the condemned cell was empty next morning. Gabriel Myddelton was gone, and the warder knew nothing about it. They dismissed him, of course, as without his connivance the girl would have been closely watched, as well as the prisoner; but nothing could ever be proved against him, and the mystery has never been solved. Several people met Margaret Territ driving alone to the gaol, and several met her driving back, still alone; but the fact remained. Old Myddelton's murderer never was seen after."

"A clever escape," said Royden, with a quiet smile.

"Why, Mr. Keith, what credit you give the miserable young woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Trent. "We know hardly anything of the escape; how do you know it was clever?"

"True, Mr. Haughton favoured me with *very* few particulars," assented Royden, coolly.

"From that time Margaret Territ has been literally lost to the world," continued the Rector, "and I feel sure we can never know any further particulars of Gabriel's escape."

"Unless we some day hear them from Gabriel himself."

"Oh, Mr. Keith," cried Theodora, "please don't talk of such a thing! Come, why have we stayed so long before this horrid portrait; and why talk so much about a wicked felon?"

"I suppose," said Royden Keith, addressing Mr. Haughton in a clear, marked tone, "that there is no doubt about Gabriel Myddelton's having been, as Miss Trent says, a wicked felon? *You* would doubtless investigate the facts?"

"Supposing Gabriel Myddelton innocent," Mrs. Payte struck in, drowning Lawrence's scornful retort, "would he have old Myddelton's money?"

"Impossible, even if he came back and acquitted himself. The money was willed from him."

"Phoebe," whispered Honor, as they moved from before the picture, "Mr. Keith is quite sure that Gabriel did murder old Mr. Myddelton. I can see he is."

"Of course," cried Phoebe; "who ever doubted it?"

"That's pretty," exclaimed Mrs. Payte, standing opposite a heavily-framed painting of a young girl and a pony; "and I declare it reminds me of our dinner. Why is that?"

"Because it is the same sweep of park, Mrs. Payte," explained Honor. "This is the spot where we dined, and the pony and girl stand just between where we were and the front of the mansion. Do you guess that it is the portrait of Lady Lawrence when a girl? She was not fifteen when she went out to India, you know."

"I'd rather see a likeness taken later," spoke Mrs. Payte, curtly. "That tells nothing of what she would be now."

"We have a sketch of her taken lately," said Honor. "She is tall and stout, with smooth black hair, and a placid, serious face."

"I don't like that sort of old lady," objected Mrs. Payte,

moving away impatiently, and leaving Honor to wonder a little at the bad taste of this speech from one who was so essentially different.

"It certainly is a beautiful park," said the little old lady, stopping before one of the gallery windows. "What do you intend to do, Mr. Haughton, if you inherit Abbotsmoor?"

"Let it," replied Lawrence, promptly.

"And you, Miss Owen?"

"Certainly let it," returned Phœbe, delighted to echo her guardian's answer.

"And you, Miss Trent?"

"Pull it down," said Theodora, "and build a handsome, modern mansion, raised on terraces."

"Wise," assented the old lady as she passed the question on.

"You, Captain Trent, doubtless agree with Miss Trent?"

"I suppose so," replied Hervey, lazily; "but I should soon cut down whole acres of the timber,"

"Wise, too. And you, Miss Craven?"

"I never thought about it, but I should—restore it, I suppose," said Honor, smiling; "restore it, and——"

"And what?" inquired the old lady, sharply.

"And try to make the old place, and even the old name, honoured again."

"Gabriel has rendered that impossible," interposed Lawrence.

"Quite impossible," assented Mrs. Payte; "and your idea is childish, Honor. I should have said, if I had been you, pull it all down and leave not one stone upon another."

"I declare, Honor," whispered Hervey, when the group was scattered again, "that little old creature has done nothing but grumble and make herself disagreeable all day. I shall tell her so presently."

"Which will be making yourself much more disagreeable."

They strolled for some time longer through the great, gloomy rooms, admiring and finding fault, chattering and criticising, Theodora's sarcasm excited very often by Honor's fresh delight over what she called trifles, and little Mrs. Payte popping always just into that very group where she did not seem to be wanted.

So closely had Lawrence Haughton followed Honor through that day, and so merry had she been, that it was

a great surprise to Royden Keith, late on in the afternoon, to come upon her seated in one of the staircase windows alone, and with a wistful earnestness in her eyes as she looked out over the park.

"It is a beautiful estate, Miss Craven," he said, as he paused beside her, looking intently, and rather quizzically, down into her face. "Are you wishing it were yours?"

"No," she answered, in a tone as grave as the beautiful young face; "I am only wondering how any one could have lived here such a life as old Mr. Myddelton lived. And——"

"And?" he questioned, gently.

"And wondering if such a life could ever be led here again."

"Heaven forbid!"

She looked up into his face, anxiously, and he met the gaze with one of fearless confidence.

"I have no fear," he said; "I see no cloud upon old Myddelton's home now, and no blight upon his wealth."

Then she smiled, still looking up into his face; and somehow it seemed as if that gaze, or the few words, had given each a quiet confidence in the other.

CHAPTER X.

He little thought, when he set out,
Of running such a rig.

COWPER.

THE tea-tables had been hurriedly carried in from the park to the great hall, and the guests had gathered there in haste; those, at least, whom the suddenly-lowering clouds had warned in time.

"It was very lucky we were so near," said Theodora, looking down complacently upon her thin, crisp dress.

"Very," assented Phœbe, with most heartfelt emphasis; "only it is a pity Honor's away."

"Is Honor away?" asked Captain Trent, looking out upon the fast-falling rain. "What a bore for her!"

"Dear me, dear me!" grumbled Mrs. Payte, moving restlessly about. "How silly of the child to run off in that way, with no waterproof, or goloshes, or umbrella!"

One or two laughed, recalling the picture of Honor as they saw her last, in her pretty summer dress, and with the

bright sunshine round her ; but others were too much vexed to smile.

"Where did you see her last, Phœbe?" inquired Lady Somerson. And everyone waited to hear the answer.

"I saw her last at one of the side entrances," explained Phœbe. "I knew she was going about the park to— to hide from Lawrence, and Lawrence came up just then and asked her where would she go, and she said, Nowhere ; and as soon as ever he was gone, saying he would be back in a minute, she ran off. Afterwards he came back and went to find her. But I don't suppose he has : Honor is so quick."

"Miss Owen, if you will kindly tell me which are Miss Craven's shawls and umbrella," said Royden, turning over a pile of wraps which lay in the hall, "I will find her."

"I think," interposed Theodora, in a raised, distinct tone, "that we can safely trust Honor to find her way here. She knows the park well, and you do not, Mr. Keith."

But Royden answered lightly that he was used to finding his way, and donning his loose overcoat, and carrying a close umbrella and the blue waterproof which Phœbe had given him, he started. He had a strong idea that Honor would be taking shelter in that hollow oak on the outskirts of the park, and though he had no motive for the surmise, he was not mistaken. In the sombre gloom within the bole of the great oak, he saw the girl's bright face looking out, with a doubtful expression ; as if the enjoyment of the position were somewhat questionable, but yet to be staunchly maintained. Royden, smiling at the wet figure in its heavy frame, handed her the cloak, and told her she might venture to the house in that, and under the umbrella.

"I am not coming," she said : "I am thoroughly soaked. I was wet through before I could reach this shelter, and I shall be scolded and laughed at."

"Let me help you on with your cloak," was Royden's only response, as he held it at the opening of the tree. "No one will see anything but the cloak. May I come in?"

"No," said Honor, drawing back. "I won't be seen. Go back to your tea, Mr. Keith ; and presently, when you are all busy starting, I'll slip up and take my place ; then I shall escape——"

She stopped suddenly, but Royden guessed what she

wished to avoid. It was not difficult for him to imagine either Miss Haughton's corrections, Miss Trent's sneers, or Miss Owen's exclamations.

"Very well, I will wait for you here," he said, coolly.

So, leaning against the tree in silence, he waited, while she grew gradually uncomfortable in her snug retreat, and, from being amused at seeing him there in the rain, grew vexed, without understanding that this vexation was another name for anxiety.

"Your hat is spoiling, Mr. Keith," she said at last, with a sense of injury upon her.

"Is it?"

He took it off and examined it leisurely, while the rain fell heavily and slowly upon his uncovered head—such a handsome head!

"It will bear a little more," he added, replacing it.

"I wish you would go back," she began again, presently;

"I'm quite comfortable, but you are not."

"I think I have the better position," maintained Royden, coolly. "Your atmosphere has a mustiness about it which I do not envy." Another pause.

"Do go!" exclaimed the girl, pettishly. "Everybody will be wondering where you are, and there will be such a fuss!"

"I like a fuss," said Royden, quietly; "and so do you."

"Indeed I don't!" asserted Honor, in hot haste. "I cannot bear a fuss. What do you mean, Mr. Keith?" she asked, venturing forward a little in her den. "What makes you say I like a fuss?"

"I see you do."

"You are very unjust!" cried Honor, rousing herself into a state of wrath which she all the time knew to be utterly childish. "You say it just because you want to be in the house. Please to go."

"I will," said Royden, calmly, "when I want to be in the house."

"You are quite wet," cried Honor, calming down a little, and feeling very small and powerless to impress him in any way with her own anger.

"Yes. Are you as wet?"

"Oh, much wetter, of course. You have an overcoat. I had nothing over this thin dress."

A look of anxiety, swift as thought, passed over Royden's face ; but his next words were rather more leisurely even than they had been, and therefore of course more successful.

"The others will be amused, Miss Craven, to see you in there. Mr. Haughton is coming towards us now. Don't stir yet. Captain Trent is walking in this direction too. Now you may enjoy the pleasure of a fuss."

Without another word Honor stepped from the hollow tree—her blue cloak failing to hide the limp appearance of her dress and spoiled hat—and coolly Royden took his place beside her.

"How do you feel now?" he inquired presently, glancing down upon her.

"Hungry, thank you."

"I wish he hadn't come," she said to herself, petulantly ;
"I would rather any one else had found me."

Yet, when she joined them all, under a heavy fire of sympathy and astonishment and blame, she looked up into Royden's quiet, amused face, and—so variable is a woman's mind—wished they had all treated the matter just as he had.

"Oh, Honor, I'm so glad I did not come!" exclaimed Phoebe, ruefully.

"So am I," returned Honor, pleasantly, as she looked from Phoebe's showy dress down to her own wet garments.

"This sort of thing adds considerably to the expense of a picnic," observed Jane Haughton.

"Don't take any more notice, please, Jane," whispered the girl, in real and earnest entreaty, as she took her tea, standing ; "my dress was not new, and I daresay it will wash."

"Come, Honor," put in Lawrence, "I must put you on more than that cloak."

"I don't want more," said Honor, shrinking from his touch. "Oh, Lawrence, how I do hate to be taken care of in this way!" she added, as he hovered about her. "I like to be forgotten. It is such a relief to feel that nobody knows or cares anything about one."

Not by very many was Honor the only one who, in impatient youth, has felt this strongly, because the care they received was not the care they loved. And they do not think that there may come a time when all such random words will sting with a keen, reproachful memory.

"You shall have a dress of mine when we reach Deergrove, Honor," said Theodora, looking with placidity on the girl's limp figure. "Oh, Mr. Keith, see how wet your hat is ! it left quite a little pool when you took it up. That's through Honor—how vexatious !"

"Most vexatious," assented Royden, looking critically down upon the wet hat. "As an Englishman, this disaster touches me in a sensitive spot."

"Are you *really* an Englishman ?" inquired Theodora, evidently glad of this vent for a little of her overflowing but suppressed curiosity.

"Is it not proved by my anxiety for my hat ? Hat-worship belongs to no other nation. Don't you notice in England how a man's first and deepest care is always bestowed upon his hat ?"

"Especially in church," added Mr. Haughton, flippantly. "Before he seats himself he breathes into it a prayer for its safety—and that's about the only time he looks really devout through the service."

"But though you may be really an Englishman, Mr. Keith," persisted Miss Trent, "you must have been very much abroad."

"Yes. Don't you think, Miss Craven, that your hat is in as bad a plight as mine ? It does not nearly look so tall as Miss Owen's now."

"Phoebe thinks a hat cannot be too tall for *her*," remarked Mr. Haughton, superciliously.

"Very wise, Miss Phoebe," said Royden, gravely. "Paddy's tall hat was the means of saving his life, if you recollect. A bullet passed through the top of his high hat. 'There,' said Paddy, complacently, as he examined the hole, 'if I'd had a low hat, that bullet would have gone right through my head.' We should always choose tall hats, shouldn't we, Miss Owen ?"

No suspicion crossed the mind of any one of his reason for talking thus.

"Honor," said Mrs. Payte, when the rain was over, and the carriages were coming round to the door in the gathering twilight, "take this large shawl of mine ; I have wrapped enough. You are coming with us in Mr. Keith's dog-cart—you and Mr. Romer. Lady Somerson and Mrs. Romer are snug together in the Somerson carriage, and we go so

fleety behind those beautiful horses. And then," added the little lady, betraying her motive, "you can stop at The Larches and change your dress."

"Oh! no," said Honor; "I——"

"You dare not venture—eh?" inquired the little old lady.

"Theodora says she will lend me a dress," amended the girl.

"Yes, so she will," remarked Mrs. Payte, dryly, "and a nice baggy old thing it will be. Don't I see how she is enjoying the idea of it even now? She won't let you rival her to-night, child. Never mind, there is a beaut——"

"Mrs. Payte," put in Theodora, appearing at that moment, and graciously addressing the little old lady, of whose very existence she had all day endeavoured to be unaware, "would you not like to change places with me for the drive to Deergrove? You will meet the wind in the seat you occupied in coming, whereas mine is a sheltered seat."

"This is a thoughtful idea, of yours, Miss Trent," returned the old lady, meditatively, "nevertheless, I like the seat I occupied in coming."

"But you would be so comfortable in our carriage."

"I shall be comfortable in Mr. Keith's, thank you."

"It is so chilly to-night," urged Theodora. "Had you not better change your mind?"

"No, nor my place," said the little lady, emphatically. "I shall drive back as I drove here, thank you—behind Mr. Keith's splendid horses, and side by side with him. He is a clever man, and we get on admirably; now and then talking Shakespeare and the musical glasses, and now and then 'cooing and billing, like Philip and Mary on a shilling.' No, I have no wish for a change."

Theodora's head was at a lofty elevation when she turned away, and her muttered "Odious!" was not confined to her own ears alone.

"Her exertions for my welfare are unselfish," observed Mrs. Payte, dryly, "and her motive inscrutable."

"Honor Craven was so bent on being driven by you, Mr. Keith," remarked Theodora, as he assisted her into her carriage, "that we other girls had no chance at all, even if we had wished it."

"Which of course, Miss Trent, you did not."

"But of course I did," she pouted, declining to see that

he wished to drop the subject, "only all the girls are not so forward as Honor."

"Miss Craven," said Royden, with proud quietness, "has not even yet consented to take that vacant seat in my dog-cart—I wish she would."

No word further could Theodora say. She leaned back in her corner of the carriage, and during the drive, hardly uttered a sentence, either to her mother or to Hervey; her only consolation being the thought that, in the garb destined for her, Honor Craven would present a spectacle slightly at variance with the dainty figure which she had always mildly chafed to see about the rooms where she wished to reign, but which, since she had known Royden Keith, excited every jealous and spiteful passion in her languid nature.

"There—that will be our last glimpse of Abbotsmoor for a time," said the Rector, speaking to Honor with rather unusual gravity, as the dog-cart rolled smoothly under the trees of the avenue; "it is a beautiful place, and I hope the tragedy we have been recalling to-day will be the last to throw its shadow over it."

She turned and looked up into his face, surprised.

"Of course it will be the last, Mr. Romer. What other could there be?"

"My dear," said the Rector, in a thoughtful tone, which told Honor that something had vexed him that day, "there will be tragedies enacted so long as jealousy and envy are allowed to be unbridled passions. Let us do our best to keep our hearts free from them."

CHAPTER XI.

So Love does raine

In stoutest minds, and maketh monstrous warre,
He maketh warre: he maketh peace againe,
And yet his peace is but continuall jarre;
O miserable men that to him subject arre!

SPENSER.

THE daylight had quite faded when the picnic party reached Deergrove, and the rain had made the air so chilly that they were not sorry to see fires in the handsome, un-homely rooms.

"Of course you must change your dress, Honor," remarked Theodora, joining her in the hall. "Come up to my room."

Honor was not there long. Almost as soon as the other guests, who had been upstairs only to wash their hands, was she down again, sipping her tea at the drawing-room fire; and, of all the involuntary laughter which her appearance provoked, her own was the most full of merriment, although she knew there was many a dress Theodora might have lent her of which the misfit or unsuitableness would have been scarcely perceptible, while in this it was very painfully so.

"Theodora, my dear," blandly commented Mrs. Trent, levelling her glass, "how odd Honor looks in that dress!"

Theodora smiled a gentle assent, but forbore to press her advantage just then.

Still, Honor, even in her questionable garb, was not to be repressed. It almost seemed as if she had determined that, in defiance of the unpicturesque and unbecoming dress, she would be to-night the rival whom Theodora fancied she had annihilated; yet such an intention in reality was far from her thoughts. In her girlish light-heartedness, and in that intense power of enjoyment possessed by those who are endowed with a keen perception, alike of the beautiful and the ludicrous, Honor's merriment was real merriment, and therefore infectious. Random she might have been in her fun, but flippant never; nor did one word of unkindness pass the laughing lips.

"I like to see young people capable of thoroughly enjoying themselves," observed Mrs. Payte to the Rector, as he joined her on her couch. "Is it the remnant of an age that's past, or is it the foreshadowing of an age to come? Look at Theodora Trent, the model of this age. Why, she might have been in her present position for a hundred years, for any freshness it possesses for her."

"The age does very well," said the Rector, asserting the truth good-humouredly. "Honor may look as bored and languid as Miss Trent when she has been in society as long."

"Watch Mr. Haughton throwing straws against the wind," said the little old lady, after a pause. "He was mad with Honor just now, and when he had spoken to her he

took up a book to pretend to read, and his hand shook as I only fancied a man's hand could shake in a novel. I'm glad to see that Hervey Trent looks more in his element here than he did about the rooms at Abbotsmoor."

"Probably because the carpets were up at Abbotsmoor," laughed the Rector. "Trent is pre-eminently a carpet-knight."

"Pre-eminently," repeated Mrs. Payte, her shrewd eyes following Captain Hervey's slight, inert figure, "and I remember an old Spanish proverb which says a soldier nau better smell of gunpowder than musk."

"Theodora, my dear," spoke Mrs. Trent, acting as prompted by her daughter, and as cleverly as long practice could make her, "can we not have a little music? Suppose you set the example."

Theodora demurred, of course; but, when her mother's request had been backed anxiously by others, she took her seat at the piano with slow grace, and waited for a few seconds with folded hands, as if for an inspiration. But Miss Trent knew well what she intended to sing before her mother's request had been uttered.

After her performance Captain Hervey acceded to the general demand for one of his songs, and went through it very creditably. Then—for neither Mr. nor Miss Houghton understood a note of music—Phœbe was prevailed upon to delight the audience with her two-hundredth rendering of a certain reverie, whose gliding course halted a good deal under her plump little fingers, and whose dreamy train of thought was, to say the least, jerky; but it was, of course, pronounced a pretty thing—when over.

"Miss Craven, do you not sing?"

Mr. Keith, in the very middle of Theodora's coaxing demand for a song, had turned to the girl whom Miss Trent had hitherto ignored.

"I am not a good singer," said Honor, in her frank, bright way; "I have always been more fond of trying new music than of carefully practising."

"You read music very easily, then?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes, *that* is easy to me; but——"

"But you will sing with me?"

"Now, Mr. Keith," pleaded Miss Trent, from the music-

stool beside them, "please come ; I am going to accompany you."

"Thank you," said Royden, a great deal more heartily than he would have said it two minutes before, "I am ready ; and Miss Craven is going to sing too. We will have the first duet we find."

As he spoke, he took up a copy of *Faust*, and opened at an early duet between Faust and Marguerite—a duet which is, perhaps, not in that opera alone, but in all operas, unequalled in its graceful tenderness and its intense love.

The guests were silent, and some of them gathered about the piano, listening in rapt astonishment.

"One more !" cried Lady Somerson and the Rector in a breath, when the last notes had died away. "One more duet from the same opera !"

Royden turned the leaves, and asked Honor if she would sing the one to which he pointed. She nodded brightly, and Theodora, reading the rather difficult accompaniment with moody intentness, began again. There was no pathetic tenderness in this music, only the pathos of a wild and passionate despair ; and when the last note had ceased, Honor felt a sudden heavy sadness seize her.

"I wish," she thought to herself, with inexplicable longing, "that we had sung that first. I wish the other had come last. That was so beautiful and happy—this is so sorrowful !"

Of course Theodora insisted on Mr. Keith's singing duets with her afterwards, while Honor was very glad to sit apart unnoticed : and when at last Royden sang alone the exquisite tenor solo, "*Versa nel mio*"—so much more beautiful and tender, if well sung to a piano, than it is upon the stage—she bent her head upon the book she pretended to read, and silenced Hervey, almost with a sob, when he began whispering to her. But when all the music was over, the mood left her.

"Honor"—it was some little time after this, and Mrs. Payte had caught the girl standing, gazing silently at Theodora and her mother—"what are you puzzling over ?"

"I was wondering," Honor answered, without hesitation, "how I should entertain if I were rich—at least, how I should *try* to do it. What a silly idea it was !" added the girl, with sudden recol'

"Very silly," acknowledged the old lady, speaking so loudly that the colour mounted in Honor's face. "But, by the way, that reminds me that I have a little fortune-teller upstairs, in my satchel. Mrs. Disbrowe—poor thing! all her little vagaries are excusable—made it, and asked me to bring it to amuse you. All I want to know is, who's to believe it? You'll see how inappropriate the mottoes are sure to be. Fetch it, Honor, and let's see what it tells us. This is the sort of time to be silly, if one ever should be."

"Oh, yes, let's have our fortunes told," cried Phoebe, ecstatically, while Honor ran upstairs.

"Yes, certainly our fortunes," seconded Theodora, with a little approach to energy. "Mr. Keith, you'll have yours told?"

"Remember, I do not make the mottoes, or quite understand them, or at all believe in them," said Mrs. Payte, as Honor laid the satchel in her lap. "I brought the little fortune-teller because Selina said you might glean an atom of fun out of it."

The toy which the old lady took from her bag was a doll dressed gipsy-fashion, in the folds of whose many-coloured and voluminous paper skirts lurked what the girls looked upon as "fortunes."

She laid the little figure on her knee, as she sat in her seat beside the fire, and made the young people wait at a respectful distance. She had in her hand a tiny gold pencil-case which she used now and then, but always unobserved.

"Now, who comes first?" she asked. "Is it you, Miss Trent?"

"Yes. You can tell me mine first, if it is likely to be true."

"*Suitable*, let us say," amended the old lady, without glancing up. "You have the first choice of the numbers. There are but nine here altogether, so they will but just go round."

"I choose number one," said Theodora, with her slow, conscious smile.

"Number one," repeated Mrs. Payte, very deliberately, as she pulled out a dark blue fold of the many-coloured skirts. "This is what is said on number one: '*The hearts of old gave hands, but our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.*'"

"I really do not know," continued the old lady, still without looking up, "what poet Selina has taken that from, but you see how inapplicable it is, don't you? Am I to read any more?"

"Oh! yes, please," cried Phœbe, while one or two of the others were silent, wondering over Theodora's choice.

"Then you choose," said Mrs. Payte, looking observantly up into Phœbe's face, "any number from two to nine."

"Seven," called Phœbe, with an excited little clasp of her hands; "seven is lucky, you know."

"Seven," echoed the fortune-teller, drawing out a pink fold. "This is what is written on seven: '*It is in woman as in soils—there is a vein of gold sometimes which the owner wots not of.*' That's an idea of Swift's, if I remember rightly. What do you think of it?"

"I don't call that a fortune," said Phœbe, ruefully.

"Now," continued Mrs. Payte, smiling as she refolded the pink paper, "who comes next? You, Miss Haughton?"

"No, indeed."

"Yes, please, Miss Haughton," urged Royden, in his pleasant tones; "let us all take our turn."

"I think it nonsense," returned Jane, coldly; "but if I must be as foolish as all the others, I'll say nine."

"Nine—nine—I can hardly read nine," muttered the old lady, bending over a yellow fold. "It is a couple of lines from Tennyson—

"Dark is the world to thee—
Thyself art the reason why.

I suppose," she muttered, "it isn't to be expected that any single one will be appropriate. Now, Honor, it is your turn. Of course yours won't be suitable either. Stupid institution, isn't it? Choose your number—any one from two to eight, except seven, which is taken."

"Eight, please. What colour is it, Mrs. Payte?"

"Don't be impatient and inquisitive," retorted the old lady, glancing shrewdly up into the girl's bright face, as she drew out a strip of sky blue from the gipsy's dress. "This is all there is to read to you:

"She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed;
She is a woman, therefore to be won.

A bit from *King Henry VI.* How absurd!"

"Yes—very absurd," said Honor," laughing ; but she had blushed a little too, when she had met the eyes of Mr. Keith.

"What a hit!" ejaculated Captain Trent. "Give me as true a hit, Mrs. Payte. I say number three. I wonder no one has chosen number three before."

"Do you?" said Mrs. Payte, absently, drawing out a white fold of the thick glazed paper. "We will conclude—shall we?—that it has been specially reserved for you. Here it is. Listen: '*I am not settled yet in any stable condition; but lie wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope, expecting some gentle gale to launch me out.*' That's a quotation from Howell; silly man to lie there, eh?—wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope."

"Perhaps old Myddelton's money has that to answer for," said Honor, in a tone of deep consideration.

"Why, Honor, you baby," remarked Theodora, "you speak as if this rubbish were true. Mr. Keith, you will not be so silly as to try any number, will you?"

"I cannot settle to anything," said Royden, with gravity, "until I know my motto. Please, Mrs. Payte, give me number five."

"Yes, you can have five," assented the old lady, drawing out a crimson paper; "but—but—let me see, I can scarcely detect the meaning of this. It is Byronic—*Manfred*, I fancy—

"I feel the impulse, yet I do not plunge;
I feel the peril, yet do not recede;
And my brain reels, and yet my foot is firm.

"Why, Mr. Keith," cried Theodora, a few minutes afterwards, "how silent you are over your motto! It might be your destiny, from the grave look upon your face."

"Now, Mrs. Payte," exclaimed Phoebe, "please read Mr. Haughton's."

"Will you choose your number, Lawrence?" said Honor, rather enjoying the idea; and at her words he chose it.

"Number six, if I really am to choose."

"Number six," repeated Mrs. Payte, musingly, as she slowly—very slowly—opened a green paper. "Dear me, this is all that's said on number six—

"Love he comes, and Love he tarries,
Just as fate or fancy carries—
Longest stays when sorest chidden,
Laughs and flies when pressed and bidden.

I have heard that verse before, so have you, of course. Well, is that all?"

"I am going to choose a number for Mrs. Payte herself," said the Rector, laughing; "and by that we shall judge how true her axioms are. Now, Mrs. Payte, I choose four for you; please read it."

The old lady opened a brown fold of paper, and bent to read, with her eyes full of laughter.

"This is rather trying," she said, looking sharply up into the surrounding faces. "This is what it says—

"Whether she knows the thing or no,
Her tongue eternally will go,
For she has impudence at will.

To begin with, it is a distortion of Gay's lines, which were originally applied to the masculine gender; and to end with, its inapplicability is as apparent as in the other cases. For goodness' sake, burn the creature, some of you!"

"Mrs. Payte," asked Honor, a suspicion darting across her mind, "are the numbers really there?"

The old lady raised her head, and eyed Honor sternly.

"Of course they are there. Take it and see."

She was quite right; the verses exactly answered to the numbers everyone had chosen; and it never entered into Honor's head to conjecture *when* the pencilled figures had been added over the quotations. "Thank you," she said, handing back the toy; "it is very odd."

"Honor," interposed Theodora, evidently tired of the subject, "we are going to dance now. You are fond of performing dance music, so I suppose you will play first."

Honor took her seat at the piano, and at once struck up a valse. Mr. Keith, as in duty bound, offered his arm to Theodora.

On and on went Honor, until her fingers ached; then she stopped with a rich, swift chord, and turned on her stool, smiling, to picture the sudden stop; but Theodora and her partner were the only two who had kept up so long as the music.

"How spiteful of you!" whispered Miss Trent, coming up to her alone. "You stopped because I was enjoying it."

"I thought everyone was enjoying it—except me," said Honor, naïvely; but my wrists gave way."

"Will you dance now, Miss Craven?"

Theodora turned, her eagerness evident through all her studied composure.

"You will offend Honor if you take her away from the piano, Mr. Keith. Her musical strength lies in dances."

"And, in singing, as Marguerite," added Royden, with a smile into Honor's eyes.

"Oh, I did that very badly," said Honor, turning swiftly away; "I will do this better."

And without another moment's pause, she played the opening bars of the Lancers. Then followed other dances, and still Honor was allowed to keep her seat at the piano. Once or twice Lawrence, in his stiff, stern way, proposed that some one else should take a turn; but not very eagerly, for he did not care to dance, and he could be more sure of having her near him while she played. Once or twice Captain Trent sauntered to her side, and whispered what a cool thing it was of Theodora; but he had not the courage to venture this remark to Miss Trent herself, so its only effect was a comical expression from Honor as she played on. Once or twice the Rector took Phœbe to the piano and proposed a division of labour, but Honor knew how Phœbe bungled over dance music, and so she only nodded smilingly, and still played on. And once Mr. Keith, in the hearing of all in the room, inquired coolly if it was not the turn of some one else to play.

"If I offered to play," explained Theodora, in a low tone, "Honor would not let me. She objects to dancing in boots that are not her own."

"I see," said Royden, with a quizzical gravity in his eyes.

But in another moment he was to see quite the opposite side of the picture. Little Mrs. Payte marched up to the piano, and declared, in a tone which there was no gainsaying, that Honor would much oblige her by resigning.

"I never heard such ugly things as these tunes of the present day!" she said. "Let me show you what was called dance-music when I was young."

Honor rose with evident relief and pleasure, but first she looked questioningly into the old lady's face.

"Are you sure, Mrs. Payte, that you do not say it because I have looked tired or discontented?"

"Sure," she rejoined, tersely, and sat down at once.

Lawrence rose from his lounge behind the piano.

"You will dance with me, Honor?"

"Yes," she said, so brightly and readily that Royden "saw" a little more clearly still through the excuse of the boots.

"Honor, how odious this music is!" observed Theodora pointedly, when the valse was over. "I cannot dance to it."

"Can you not? Oh, I can."

Mrs. Payte was far more determined about not giving up her occupation at the piano than even Honor had been. She sat there, tripping through the old-fashioned airs, with her wrists very much elevated, and her fingers very light upon the keys; but no one save the daughter of the house uttered a word against the performance.

"I can dance merrily to those quaint old airs—can't you?" asked Honor, appealing daringly to Theodora. "And I never knew anyone keep better time than Mrs. Payte. How kind it is of her!"

And Honor evidently felt every word she said, for, in all her happy excitement and restless enjoyment, she never forgot to thank the old lady, and offer earnestly to relieve her.

"Go on," nodded the little pianist, working away indefatigably. "I like it. I don't intend to be turned out in favour of your new-fangled style. Go on."

Honor indeed went on, and the brighter and merrier she grew, the more coldly supercilious were the glances bestowed upon her by Miss Trent; the more appalling was Miss Haughton's gaze of disapproval; the more Lawrence expanded in her smiles; the more Hervey caught himself up in his corrections and lectures, as if he feared her sudden flight from their midst; the more Phœbe raised her eyebrows with mild astonishment; the more Mrs. Trent made languid remarks of displeasure at "girls who let their spirits run away with them;" the more Lady Somerson

smiled behind her hand-screen, following with her eyes the light, restless figure, which was so beautiful, despite its ill-fitting dress ; and the more Royden Keith studied, with quiet amusement, the changing face of this girl, who seemed as yet to possess so little knowledge of the world which had set its seal upon his thoughtful face.

"You do not often see girls make themselves ridiculous, just as Honor does to-night, do you, Mr. Keith ?"

Theodora had paused beside him as he leaned against the chimney watching the dancers—watching one especially, as Miss Trent plainly saw. He looked down and answered her, his eyes growing full of fun as their intentness vanished ; he looked down and answered her truthfully, but as he would rather have died than answer her, if he could have foreseen how and when she would report and distort his words.

"Very seldom."

"That is what I cannot understand in Honor's nature," continued Theodora, placidly insinuating the wide contrast in her own ; "her perfect incapacity for any serious thought and feeling. She is rather pretty, and, as Hervey says, she is amusing sometimes ; but she is not at all one you could fancy at the head of an establishment, or, indeed, moving in any wider range of society. As mamma says"—Theodora was gaining courage from the uncontradicting face—"any man would be unwise to bestow a strong affection upon Honor, if he expected depth of affection in return ; do you think so too ?"

"That it would be unwise for some men to bestow a strong affection upon Miss Craven ? Yes."

It was at this moment, just as Theodora smiled assent to his words, that Honor herself came up to them, with Lawrence following her to entreat her hand for the next dance.

"Honor, you are making yourself rather oddly conspicuous, are you not ?" inquired Theodora, in a would-be whisper. "We were wondering to see you."

Honor glanced up into Royden's face with a gaze of swift and pained inquiry, while the soft pink deepened in her cheeks.

"Honor bright."

"So he answered quietly, with his rare smile ; but, when

the two words had been thus involuntarily uttered, a dusky flush rose in his face ; and his eyes, meeting hers, asked pardon for the jest. No one had noticed her blush, or the sudden brightening of her eyes, but everyone could see that no words of his had vexed her.

Lawrence led her off in pride again, and the young face was once more the brightest and the happiest in the room. For a while Lawrence Haughton's jealousy lay sleeping, but his sister redoubled the keenness of her watch, and Theodora redoubled her quiet words and glances of contempt. By force of contrast, Miss Trent appeared almost genial to Jane and Phœbe that night. Jane was so harmless in her easy chair, and Phœbe so insignificant in her small, gushing amiability, that Theodora Trent, in her graciousness, could afford to patronise these two unhurtful guests ; only repaying herself by a few sleepy words of jesting contempt, uttered now and then beyond their hearing.

Only Mr. Keith and Captain Trent received any amount of attention from the daughter of their hostess, and, though Hervey was quite aware of the inferior quality and quantity dealt out to him, he did not fret over it. He could not, just yet, feel any unpleasant consciousness of inferiority in the presence of his possible rival, perhaps from the fact that Hervey Trent was too thoroughly an artificial man to appreciate the intense reality of Royden's nature.

"Mr. Keith"—little Mrs. Payte, from her seat at the piano, without turning her head, called him as he passed near, and he paused, standing beside her ; it was a lull between the dances, and her fingers were striking only a few idle chords—"were you going to ask Honor to dance?"

"No."

"Why not? Because of that clumsy dress Theodora chose to lend her, or the boots that do not fit?"

"No," he answered, rather gravely, following the moving fingers on the keys, "not for that reason."

"She is as pretty in her ugly gown," resumed the old lady, energetically, "as Theodora in her *falbala*."

"*Falbala*!" he echoed, laughing. "How strange to hear that word! I heard it last in Spanish America."

"It's a common enough word," rejoined the old lady, testily, "among those who are not solely English. It belongs

to Spain and Italy and France—don't fancy it peculiar to South America, pray—and it is more natural to me than the stupid, distorted word 'furbelows,' which these girls use. Isn't it sad," she added, with a quick change of tone and a keen, upward glance, to see Honor Craven exciting herself so childishly, in spite of Captain Trent's repeated reprimands?"

"Captain Trent is not wearing himself out," said Royden, in a leisurely tone. "Captain Trent is one of those lucky individuals who are able to stroll through life."

"And they are the wisest, too," asserted Mrs. Payte, with unmistakable emphasis. "Why should men gallop through life—as some do?"

"Or trip through it, as some women do?" said Royden, with a smile.

"Or stalk through it, as some other women do?" added the little old lady, with a sly, swift glance at Miss Haughton. "Have you asked *her* to dance?"

"Yes, I asked Miss Haughton, and she refused me, as you did."

"For my reason, probably. One evening of dancing would leave me like the Dutch skipper, who came home so thin that his wife and his sister could not both look at him at the same time."

"Ten minutes ago," she presently resumed, playing a little louder, "I heard Miss Haughton wondering to Miss Trent why she invited that disagreeable little Mrs. Payte here. And on whom do you think our hostess laid the iniquity?"

"On me, if she did me justice," said Royden, pleasantly.

"Yes; on you. I was your guest for the day, she said; and I of course was obliged to be invited. How do you feel?"

"Decidedly better."

"Then now you are going to ask Honor Craven to dance this valse?" I remember a tune that will send her feet flying, even in big boots."

"Why do you wish it?" he asked, rather gravely, as his eyes went swiftly across the room in their search for Honor.

"For two reasons. She is a good dancer—old women are

not always so blind as you imagine—and I want you to have one thoroughly pleasant dance before we go. Honor's height will just suit you. Go and try."

He turned at once and went, his eyes still fixed upon her in her distant corner, and a great pleasure and anticipation in their depths. He came up to her just as she stood, alone and quite still, against the open door; and he saw that her face for that moment lost its brilliant merriment, and her beautiful eyes were full of quiet thought.

"Are you very tired?"

He spoke quietly, but his voice scattered the thought in a moment.

"No, not tired," she said, and simply and unaffectedly she put her hand within his proffered arm.

"This is the last dance, I believe. Will you give it to me?"

She only smiled without a word, and they took their places. It was a long waltz: Mrs. Payte's busy fingers went from one old air to another untiringly; yet among all the dancers, strange to say, it was Honor who stopped first—Honor who had seemed so restless and unwearying.

"I had no idea I was so tired," she said, her hand trembling in his clasp; "let us stop now."

Royden looked down, an anxious surprise in his eyes.

"Was it painful to you to dance with me?"

She shook her head and laughed. It was a gesture of curious self-reproach, and the laugh was a little forced.

"No, no," she said, "but—I do not know how it was—there came a sudden pain; swift enough, for it is gone now; but it was heavy and miserable, like a foreboding."

"Rest for a moment here at the window. See what a beautiful night it is!"

She heaved a soft little sigh, possibly in her relief because he had not laughed at her childish and almost superstitious idea, possibly in thorough enjoyment of the rest and calm.

The dancing for a long time went on behind them, as they stood in silence looking out on the dim autumn night, but it stopped at last.

"Are you rested? Are you quite rested?"

As he spoke, he touched the hand that lay upon his arm, and she looked up with a smile to meet his questioning eyes.

"Quite rested, and that pain is gone."

He did not answer, but she knew that some strong emotion which she could not fully comprehend, found utterance in that one slow, long-drawn breath.

The valse was over, and Mrs. Payte's shrewd eyes were turned from the piano. She saw the dancers separate and mingle with the other occupants of the room, breaking then into groups of twos and threes, with here and there perhaps one solitary figure left out, as was her own just then; though the brisk little old lady did not give that fact the faintest shadow of regret. She took her isolation so little to heart that she found herself able to cull a racy amusement, as usual, from the remarks which her keen ears received in an illicit manner.

"What makes you look so absent, Honor?"

"I am not absent," said the girl, turning her head from Lawrence Haughton when he joined her with these words.

"I said you looked absent, which is true."

"What does it signify how I look?" she asked, appealing to him with a sadness underlying her impatience. "I wish you would not look at me, Lawrence—why should you?"

"Let me look at whom I may," he answered, moodily, "it is always you I see; and that sudden thoughtful fit after your last valse was, to say the least, unlike you, Honor, and——"

"Now I must go and thank Mrs. Payte for playing for me."

"For you?" rejoined Mr. Haughton, sulkily. "The thanks are due from Theodora and her mother. Leave it to them, Honor."

"Trust Honor to make acquaintance readily with low people," remarked Theodora to Captain Trent, as she sauntered with him up to where her mother sat. "Doesn't she look absurd, laying herself out to that old—to that extent?" corrected Miss Trent, uncomfortably conscious of Royden's presence.

"Yes—oh yes, of course," assented Captain Hervey, obeying very readily his cousin's command to look at Honor. "She looks pretty, doesn't she? Very pretty. But of course you are right, Theo—"

CHAPTER XII.

Seal up your lips, and give no words, but—mum.

Henry VI.

THE offices of Messrs. Carter & Haughton, solicitors, were opposite the Royal Hotel, in the most important street in Kinbury. The situation was as decidedly the best situation in the town for a lawyer's office, as Mr. Haughton was himself the most prosperous lawyer; and the rooms were so furnished and arranged as to give the visitor an impressive idea of the wide and select practice of the firm. Not that Lawrence Haughton had any partner now, but among the old clients Mr. Haughton's offices were still the offices of the firm, and Lawrence Haughton himself but a representative of it.

These offices consisted of three rooms. A small one on the ground-floor, furnished with a huge double desk, two high stools, two maps, two odd chairs, and two jocular and rather idle clerks, who spent six hours of every day chatting together, and between whiles either performed in an upright hand upon Lawrence Haughton's foolscap, or drew up, with elaborate care, essays and notes, to be read, amid great applause, at the meetings of the Kinbury Young Men's Literary Association.

At the top of the short flight of stairs, two rooms opened on a lobby, and the one to the back of the house was Mr. Slimp's office, a room in which that pallid little gentleman conducted his own business as well as his employer's, and very much subdued the spirits, while assisting in the legal education, of Mr. Haughton's articled clerks. This was by no means an uncomfortable or meanly furnished room; nor was Bickerton Slimp ignorant of the art of taking his ease there, while he hatched his mean and petty plans; but the sanctum of the lawyer himself was Mr. Slimp's favourite resting-place, and on the morning of the day after the picnic at Abbotsmoor he was standing there on the rug, with an appearance as nearly approaching to ease and at-homeness as it was in the power of his small and angular person to assume.

This private office of Mr. Haughton's was a large front

room overlooking the vestibule of the Royal Hotel opposite, and no one glancing round it could fail to be impressed by the apparently limitless extent of the business entrusted to Lawrence Haughton, solicitor. How many secrets he must have held in his grasp, touching the well-known names so prominently displayed ! How much he must have known of those families which Kinbury—with a wide appreciation of ancestry—called its “good families !” And, beyond that, how evident it was that he had in his keeping money as well as secrets. Yet the clients, looking ever so closely, could detect no sign of lavish or needless expenditure ; and shrugging their shoulders, would pronounce Lawrence Haughton a true Myddelton at heart, possessing inherently the old man’s talent of amassing wealth—this being no means an unpleasant reflection for those whose fortunes were in his hands.

Lawrence Haughton had pushed his round-backed chair from the writing-table, and leaning back, with his elbows on the arms, he began to fold and unfold an empty envelope, an unmistakeable sign that his conversation with his chief clerk was over. Mr. Slimp had made a movement to retire—a quite unusual proceeding with him unless his master had shown this sign of having done with him.

“No evidence, you are quite sure, of such a name having ever been upon the records ?” repeated Mr. Haughton, some suppressed excitement stirring his harsh tones.

“No proof at all, sir. A young Royden Sydney was called to the bar in 1859, but he left the profession within a year.”

“That’s no evidence,” retorted Mr. Haughton, curtly ; “I found that out a week ago.”

“That is the only mention of such a Christian name,” continued Mr. Slimp, in his peculiar tones of mingled deference and assurance. “As for the surname, there have been several Keiths, but not one since 1859.”

“Then this journey,” put in Mr. Haughton, impatiently “has given you no further clue ? You tell me now only exactly what you told me on Tuesday night, when you returned from London.”

“That is all I have been able to discover, sir.”

Lawrence was silent for a minute, absently folding and

refolding the paper in his hands, and seeing nothing of his clerk's wily glance into his brooding face. Suddenly recollecting himself, as it seemed, he wheeled his chair before his writing-table again, and, nodding towards the door, took up his pen.

Mr. Slimp walked softly across the carpeted floor, and closed the door behind him, without a sound. He should be summoned again, he knew, when any further plans were to be mooted.

Half an hour after this, Mr. Haughton opened the door of his chief clerk's office.

"I shall be out for ten minutes," he said, "not more."

He did not glance in at the lower office as he passed, but the two clerks heard his step, and looked out to see which way he went; more for the diversion of a gaze into the street, than for any lively interest they felt in the lawyer's proceedings.

"Into the Royal Hotel! What's up?"

"Bitter beer."

But it was no order for bitter beer which Mr. Haughton gave, as he walked into the vestibule of the Royal Hotel.

"Is Mr. Keith within?" he asked of the waiter.

Now hotel waiters are, as a rule, quick and observant; and the man to whom the lawyer addressed this question was no exception. While he answered politely, "I believe he is, sir, but I will fetch his servant," he was cogitating to himself in a very different strain. "Lawyer Haughton hasn't put on that friendly air for nothing. He's never been over to see Mr. Keith before, and these aren't his usual grim tones."

He cast one more keen glance into Mr. Haughton's face when he returned with Pierce, and then went on into the bar with an unmoved countenance.

Royden Keith rose and put down his book when Mr. Haughton, uninvited, followed the card Pierce brought in. Royden offered his hand in his easy, courteous way; but, though he showed no evidence of it, he felt a great surprise at this visit.

During the day before, both at Abbotsmoor and Deergrove, there had been no concealment in Lawrence Haughton's suspicion and avoidance of this stranger of whom

others had made so much ; and Royden had felt and understood the reason of this, as only a shrewd and sensitive man can understand and feel. Therefore was this unexpected visit, so far, a puzzle to him.

Mr. Haughton declined to take a chair.

"I am expected at my office in a few minutes' time," he said, by way of excuse.

Then he paused. If, when he resolved upon this visit, he had for one moment fancied it would be easy to sound Royden Keith on the one subject which at present baffled him, his first glance this morning into the young man's face convinced him of his error. Even if *possible*, the task would be far from easy.

"Our visit to Abbotsmoor yesterday," began Lawrence, thinking it wisest to make a plunge at once, "very naturally put Gabriel Myddelton into my thoughts. This morning I find them returning to him, and so I have been looking over what papers I possess relating to his crime."

"A humiliating task, I fear."

"A very humiliating task," assented Lawrence, taking up, with inexplicable heat, those few cool words of Royden's; "but I am not here with the intention of blaming him. He is as far beyond my blame as his crime is beyond my punishment."

"Is his crime beyond your punishment?" inquired Royden, with composure. "If you find him, surely you can hang him, even now."

A flame of scarlet rose to the lawyer's brow, the very veins of his face were swollen when Royden, from his great height, glanced calmly down upon him, reading his suspicion, but failing to read how this suppressed anger was caused by the consciousness of his feelings for Gabriel lying bare before the clear and quizzical eyes of this young man, whom *he* could not read at all.

"A thought struck me last night,"—Lawrence had, by a strong effort, shaken off his impotent wrath, and was continuing the conversation with as much ease as he could assume—"that Gabriel Myddelton might be in straitened circumstances, and, if any one could tell us where he was, we might be able to help him."

"Yes?" questioned Royden, in the pause, his long dark eyes fixed coolly and steadily upon the lawyer's face.

"I thought, as you have travelled much, even, as I hear, in America, you might, through your friends there, possibly make inquiries for us."

"I *have* one or two friends in America," returned Royden, in his leisurely tones; "what do you wish me to ask them?"

"I thought, as I said, that you might possibly make inquiries among them concerning Gabriel Myddelton."

"You mean, if they can be trusted in such a case?"

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed Lawrence, hastily, wondering why he could not frame his words here, and on this subject, just as he could on matters of law in his own office; "I mean, if you know any who can be trusted."

"If I do," said Royden, slowly, "what then?"

"If, through them, we could send out help to Gabriel—always providing that his identity were assured—we should be willing to do so."

With these words, the lawyer raised his eyes holdly. The younger man could hardly answer easily here, if his visitor's one haunting and damning suspicion were well-founded.

"Have you reason to believe that he went to America?"

"I have reason to believe that he landed in Quebec; but I did not hear this until it was years too late to be of service."

"Too late to capture him?"

Again the hot flame of anger burned in Lawrence Haughton's face.

"Am I not trying," he said, "to help this most degraded connection of my own?"

But for the eager, intense desire he felt to assure himself of the correctness of this suspicion of his, Lawrence would have uttered no further words on this subject. As it was, though, he would bear any words his companion might choose to say, rather than resign the chance of some day proving him a convicted and escaped criminal.

"I never spent a day in Quebec in my life," said Royden, steadily studying the lawyer's hard, embarrassed face, "so I have unfortunately no friends there to whom I can appeal on behalf of your generous plan. I have one friend, a miner, in Peru. Shall I apply to him for possible tidings of your cousin?"

"Mr. Keith," said the lawyer, in only half-concealed anger, "it appears to me that you wilfully misunderstand what I wish to say. Such conduct would make a suspicious man fancy it more than possible that you yourself are cognisant of Gabriel Myddelton's hiding-place."

The one cool glance which Royden gave into the face below him, read the whole depth and width of this man's vile suspicion; but then the lesson had been slowly learned before that glance.

"You evidently understand the nature of a suspicious man," he said, with a smile.

"Will you tell me," inquired Lawrence, with a desperate last appeal, "if you think you can be of service to me in this?"

"No, sir," rejoined Royden, gravely. "With all due deference to you, and to the law you uphold, I would not, if I could, be an agent—however remote—in leading a free man into captivity."

"You do not know, then, anything of Gabriel Myddelton?"

Nothing could more plainly have shown the desperate eagerness with which Lawrence Haughton sought to dive at a truth which lay beyond his reach than this persistence in his questioning of Royden Keith, and laying himself open to the cool and proud rejoinders which galled him as no rough or angry words could have done, and galled him with a hundred times their force because they were uttered by this man whom he suspected, yet against whom he could prove nothing. The man too of whom—though he hardly comprehended even himself the force, or strength, or meanness of the feeling—he was acutely and bitterly jealous, with the smallest and most despicable jealousy of which a man's mind is capable—meanly jealous of the face and figure so superior to his own; selfishly jealous of the luxuries and refinements the man possessed; angrily jealous of the mystery which surrounded him; savagely jealous, above all, of the power he seemed to possess of winning a love for which other men might labour and sigh in vain. No feeling less strong than this contemptible and overmastering jealousy and suspicion could have made Lawrence Haughton lengthen this interview by a renewed attempt to wring a grain of some convicting truth from his companion. But he did so, and repeated and enlarged his question.

"I properly understand you—do I, Mr. Keith? You have no knowledge of the hiding-place of Gabriel Myddelton? Let me assure you that your information will be received in strictest confidence."

Royden's steadfast eyes seemed to Mr. Haughton to take in his whole mind and person in their slow, haughty glance.

"What information, may I ask, sir?"

"Any information," rejoined Lawrence, with a last effort of humility, "with which you might favour me about my cousin, Gabriel Myddelton."

"When I have information which I wish to confide to you, I will bring it you myself. I will not trouble you to seek it so urgently."

"You offered, a few minutes ago," observed the lawyer, seizing on his last faint hope of a stray advantage, "to make inquiries of your friends in South America."

"I will do so with pleasure. By what name may I inquire for your cousin?"

"By what name?" replied Lawrence, gazing half stupefied into the cool, quizzical face above him, and wondering how it was that every word this man uttered went to strengthen his suspicion, yet every glance and tone to weaken it.

"Yes, that is my question, sir," returned Royden, quietly. "For it is not customary, I believe, even in the wilds of an unpopulated country, for a condemned criminal, who has by stratagem escaped the grip of English justice, to travel under his branded name. By what name may I inquire for your cousin?"

"You know I cannot tell!" blurted the lawyer, impotently. "A nice mockery your offer is!—you had better have made none."

"Then I will withdraw it," said Royden, glancing at the door as a footstep approached it from without.

"Of one thing I am perfectly sure," stammered Mr. Haughton, looking at his hat, as if about to put it on, but making no movement towards the door; "no gentleman would speak as you have done to-day of Gabriel Myddelton and his acts, unless he had personally known something of Gabriel and those deeds of his."

"Come in."

The knock upon the door, and Mr. Keith's leisurely

answer to it, alone had broken the pause which followed the lawyer's words.

"A letter, sir."

Pierce came up to his master with his noiseless step, and the lawyer hesitated in his intention to leave, watching Mr. Keith's hand as it took the letter from the tray the servant held.

"Waiting."

"No, sir—sent by a messenger belonging to Kinbury."

Lawrence Haughton's eyes—sharpened not only by years of practice, but by the distrust which every moment grew so upon him—rested greedily upon the envelope which Royden held without attempting to open ; but they rested there in vain, for all their keenness ; and one fancy, which had been hovering tauntingly about him, laid hold of Mr. Haughton's mind now as a mortifying conviction. Below all the quiet, rather amused ease of the young man before him lay a will far stronger than his own, a power more dominant ; and—above all humiliating to the lawyer who built so great pretensions on his reserve—a sight so much keener, and a knowledge so much truer, that his motives and suspicions had all been laid bare in this interview, which had shown *him* nothing.

Was it any wonder that Lawrence Haughton, being the man he was, should suspect that an infamous truth lay hidden somewhere ; and should vow within himself that he would drag this truth to light ?

There was no sign of Royden's opening the letter, and Lawrence had no excuse to stay longer.

"Good morning, Mr. Keith," he said, and made rather an unnecessary show of offering his hand.

"Good morning, sir," said Royden, with a slight, unconcerned bow.

Before the lawyer had reached the vestibule of the hotel, a sudden resolution formed itself from the jarring discords of mistrust and jealousy which swayed his mind. Slowly he retraced his steps, and, following immediately on the slightest signal of his approach which courtesy allowed, he entered Mr. Keith's room once more.

It was empty, but Mr. Haughton thought he would wait for a few moments, so he sauntered over to the hearth, and,

as he framed to himself the speech intended for Royden's ear, he stood with his eyes lowered.

Suddenly and swiftly a change came into his face. Stooping upon the rug, and stretching forth his cautious white fingers, he took something from the grate, and placed this something within the crown of the hat he carried.

"I see how it is," he said to himself, in self-congratulation; "he threw it there to burn, little guessing that the ashes would tell secrets. I think I will not stay now."

But Mr. Haughton had, with miraculous suddenness, to repress his smile of delight, and once more change his tactics, when, as he turned to leave the room, he encountered Royden Keith.

"I returned," he said, with a little unusual suavity in his harsh tones, "to beg that, if you think it dangerous in any way to move in the matter of discovering Gabriel Myddelton's name and place of concealment, you will not, for a moment, think of doing so."

"Danger to himself or to me?" inquired Royden in a tone of quiet irony.

The old bewilderment was falling upon Lawrence Haughton's brain once more, but there was now the pleasant consciousness of what he carried in his hat.

"Your question is odd," he said, with a curious smile. "For whom could there be danger but for the felon himself?"

"Oh, that is the law, is it? Danger only for the felon himself. That's well. Then listen, Mr. Haughton. I did not, as you are quite aware, promise you help in discovering his name and hiding-place; your return, therefore, to insinuate danger to him was unnecessary. But your courteous and well-disguised insinuation of danger to *myself* has given a zest to the idea for me, and I will now promise you to do what you desire, and be *myself* the one to bring you and Gabriel Myddelton face to face."

"If you do, you know the consequence," said Lawrence, between his teeth.

"The consequence will naturally be the carrying out of that long-delayed sentence of the law."

"Certainly. Though, as I said before," added Lawrence, hastily, "if I knew him to be in a distant country, trying to be a better man, I would wish to offer him help."

"You are generous," remarked Royden, drily ; and then the two men separated.

"I know nothing more than I knew when I went in," muttered the lawyer to himself, as he descended the stairs for the second time ; "but still I have something now which may be a proof."

Entering his own office, without having addressed either of his clerks on his way, Mr. Haughton turned the key in the door behind him. Then taking his usual seat before his writing-table, he cautiously drew the burned paper from his hat. It was but a small torn piece which he had rescued, and it was burned perfectly black, but upon it he could read, in white, two written words.

"Science would explain this in a moment," smiled Lawrence, locking the paper carefully in a private drawer, "and tell why, as that peculiar paper burnt to tinder without entirely crumbling away, and its whiteness turned to blackness, the ink should, on the contrary, turn from black to white, and fulfil its mission still, by forming the words in its strong contrast. But I do not need it explained by science. Here the words stand, and that is enough for me. When the time comes, they may be proof enough ; and in the meantime they are safe here."

CHAPTER XIII.

Unless you can swear, "For life, for death,"

Oh, fear to call it loving !

E. B. BROWNING.

IN spite of Mrs. Payte's sharp rebukes and muttered grumblings, Honor Craven acted upon the permission given her, and spent much time at East Cottage, soothing and cheering, as far as possible, the wakeful hours of the invalid whose only constant companion seemed so harsh and unfeeling. Yet those visits to the cottage were by no means easy of accomplishment for Honor. Far from being her own mistress, to spend there what time she would, and come and go as she chose, there were continual difficulties put in her way, both

by her guardian and his sister. Lawrence selfishly forbade her to be out after six o'clock, when he himself came home; and Miss Haughton considered that there were a hundred things she might be doing more useful and sensible than "dancing attendance" on a perfect stranger.

"Why don't you mend your stockings?" she would inquire, when Honor, her morning duties over, would beg permission to go.

"They don't want mending, Jane."

"Well, Phœbe's always want double mending; so why don't you help her?" would be the grumbling remark.

"Oh! let me go—do, Jane; Mrs. Disbrowe is so very ill," the girl would plead, without uttering one impatient word at Jane's proposal, though she knew that Phœbe's mending always fell entirely upon her own quick fingers.

If at last she did succeed in getting off, she must—however much she felt herself of use at the cottage—be home again for the six o'clock dinner, or incur her guardian's hoody displeasure, and in so doing bring down upon herself a perfect torrent of tears from Phœbe, and Miss Haughton's blackest looks and grimmest words. So this new task which Honor had taken upon herself was no' so easy a one as Mrs. Payte seemed to fancy, when she would meet the girl's bright face at the cottage window, and ask her sharply how many of her day's duties she had left undone. The answers always had been so truthful that even this sceptical old lady could not doubt the truth of the one which at last took the place of all others—

"None left undone to-day, Mrs Payte. I was up early, and everything is done."

Sometimes, receiving this bright answer, Mrs. Payte caught herself smiling into the girl's earnest eyes—but only sometimes. The answer generally met with a grunt of sceptical surprise, and, but that Honor looked for no thanks, her heart might have grown idle or rebellious in this task. But it never did; and when a month was gone, and October was drawing to its close, Honor was still fulfilling this one duty, her soft voice and step untiring, and her gentle hands unfailling, in their prompt and loving service.

One afternoon, when Honor reached the cottage—Miss Haughton had kept her at home all the morning, darning

tablecloths with Phoebe, whose propensity was to keep a novel under her work, and imbibe its contents surreptitiously while her younger cousin worked—she found Theodora Trent with Mrs. Payte in the cottage parlour. Miss Trent had made her duty-call as brief as possible, and now was relieved to feel that the ten minutes were over, and she might depart.

“I am very sorry to hear Mrs. Disbrowe is so ill ; I hope we shall soon have better tidings of her.”

So she was saying, in her languid tones, when Honor entered the room ; and the cold wish, so impossible of fulfilment, made the girl's heart feel hot and angry when she heard it.

“I hope so,” rejoined Mrs. Payte, curtly. “She's a good deal of trouble to me, as you may imagine.”

“Yes, I can imagine it,” assented Theodora.

“Anyone with sense can see how hard it is for me,” continued the little old lady, waxing wrath at the thought, “yet Honor never will own it. I only hope she will some day have just such a place as mine to fill ; she'll understand all about it then.”

The shrewd eyes raised to Theodora's face had an inexplicable twinkle in them ; and Theodora, understanding that Honor's conduct was deserving ridicule, laughed her short lazy laugh, and moved a little nearer to the door.

“So Mr. Keith is going away again ?”

The words stopped Miss Trent.

“Oh, no,” she said from a lofty height of superior knowledge ; “he has been away and has returned.”

“Oh, that's it, is it ? I thought he was going again ; but old women are not reliable authorities ; the absurdity of *their* tales is proverbial. I don't wonder he came back, the shooting here is so good ; I don't wonder he goes away again, the air is so vile. Mr. Haughton ought to invite him to The Larches, Honor ; he would like that.”

On this quizzical speech fell Miss Trent's slow cold question, as she looked from one to the other.

“How do you mean ? Is Honor unwomanly enough to try to attract Mr. Keith to The Larches ?”

“Unwomanly,” smiled Mrs. Payte ; “is Honor unwomanly, you ask ? I have not known her so long as you have ; please to answer your own question. I only said I thought Mr. Keith would be very glad to visit at Honor's home.”

"I think not," said Theodora, answering the quizzical words with a suppressed eagerness which sounded almost like fear; "I happen to know, in fact, for Mr. Keith has expressed to me his opinion of Honor."

"What a curious thing!" said Honor, laughing. "What was it, Theodora?"

"He said"—the words were uttered with but little compunction—"that you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection. You were very well for an hour's amusement, but any man would be a fool who offered you anything more serious than a passing flirtation—something, at any rate, to that effect. Dear me," exclaimed Theodora, with a solo of laughter, "why do you look so horror-stricken over it? Others have made the same remark before. It is your own fault that men think you vain and flippant; surely his opinion need not have turned you white to the very lips, need it? I told you for your own good."

"Don't be childish enough to undervalue what is told you for your own good," remarked the old lady, placidly. "Miss Trent, has Lady Lawrence acknowledged that photograph which was so beautifully taken at Abbotsmoor the day we were there?"

"Yes, and she admires it very much."

"She naturally would. When is she coming to England?"

"She will be here for Christmas, and we are to meet her in London."

"Has she a house in London, or was it old Myddelton's?"

"It is her own, I believe," said Theodora, the subject of conversation making even the speaker bearable—"a beautiful mansion in Kensington. I am glad we are to meet her there; I've been terribly afraid of her coming down here. It would have been awkward for her to have appointed to meet us in this neighbourhood."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Payte. "Stay, Honor, that was Selina's bell; I will go. Miss Trent, may I ask you to wait for a couple of minutes?"

Even if Theodora had been inclined to refuse, the little lady did not give her any opportunity; but she kept her scarcely more than the allotted time.

"I wish to goodness," she exclaimed, coming in with a heavy frown upon her face, "that servants were not, as a

class, such heaps of selfishness. There is mine gone for her half-holiday, goodness only knows where, and Selina moaning for a new medicine from Kinbury, fidgeting me till I don't know what to do with myself. Servants have no right to ask for holidays."

"Our servants never have them, unless we are away," observed Theodora; "we think it a very unnecessary indulgence."

"It is an absurd indulgence!" fumed the old lady; "and see how it leaves me in this case—alone in the house with two helpless invalids, for that miserable girl belonging to the cottage is of less than no use at all. Now what am I to do? I ought to go into Kinbury, but Selina is lost without me."

The faintest possible smile of contempt stirred Miss Trent's lips. Could any invalid be lost without this chattering and restless little worry? she thought. But she only said, aloud—"It is very awkward for you. Why is not the medicine sent?"

"She wishes for a bottle of a medicine she used to take. Sick women are so fanciful! She thinks a dose of *that* would give her a good night."

Honor looked up brightly at the words.

"I will go, Mrs. Payte," she said; "the little trouble will be well repaid by giving Mrs. Disbrowe a good night."

Miss Trent glanced at Honor with unconcealed surprise, but evidently considered the matter beneath argument.

"You must not go, Honor. How could you come back?"

"Let me go," pleaded Honor, with the old bright self-forgetfulness. "I will come back with Lawrence in the waggonette."

"You are sure you can do so?"

"Quite sure," said the girl, knowing how pleased Lawrence would be to bring her home.

She would not go in to Mrs. Disbrowe, she said, for fear of the sick lady's begging her not to undertake the walk, and she only nodded a quiet good-bye to Theodora. Then she set out, singing softly to herself in the wide and unfrequented road, to drown the memory of those words which Theodora Trent had repeated to her.

"What difference does it make to me?" she said to herself at last, with a funny little shake of the head, when she

found that the half-whispered song would not drown the words. "I don't care an atom."

She asserted that fact distinctly twice over ; and yet a faint, tremulous pain seized the girl when Royden Keith, in sporting-dress, and with his gun upon his shoulder and his dogs around him, came through a gate before her, and out into the road.

"He—the sight of him made me feel very angry ; I dislike him so !" she said, reasoning with herself in marvellous wisdom, as the tremor passed and the flash of vivid colour faded. "I hope he will not wait for me—I do dislike him so !"

It was an unnecessary speech, because she could plainly see that Royden had not only waited, but was coming towards her. He had a smile of pleasure on his face when they met, but, before that, it had worn the sorrow of thorough disappointment. Every few days since his dog had saved the life of that child who lived in the solitary cottage among the green lanes, Royden had paid the mother a visit. But these visits—though his voice was good to hear, and his face good to see in her gloomy home, and though his thoughtful gifts were luxuries, and his tenderness to the little child was now the little fellow's one idea of happiness—brought a growing gloom instead of brightness to the mother's face. And this very day he had found the cottage locked and empty, though on his last visit no mention had been made of the probable departure.

Royden mused deeply over the circumstance, recalling how, on that last visit, he had once again talked of Margaret Territ, and had noticed with what eager, petulant haste the mother had turned aside the subject, hurrying to say, as she had said before, that she had no neighbour Margaret—no neighbour at all—and that she wanted none. Yet on the day afterwards she had left, and had taken her child no one knew whither. How could Royden help musing upon this, and feeling that the one clue which he had for a moment held within his hand, was lost again ? Still the smile broke in his eyes as Honor came—very lingeringly—up to meet him.

"Not going into Kinbury alone, are you, Miss Craven ?" he asked, as his hand closed firmly over hers.

"Yes," said Honor, and she told him simply why.

"But this should not be," he objected, anxiously, as he made a sudden stop. "You cannot possibly walk back. Let me send the medicine out to East Cottage."

"No, thank you," returned Honor, proudly; I will go, because the commission was given to me, and I can come home with my cousin. He has the waggonette in town."

Royden said no more. He could see how firm the girl's resolution was, and, if he could not also see how delighted she was with an excuse for displaying this pride, which was anything but natural to her, why, it was not very much to be wondered at, considering how little he knew of the private confidences of Miss Theodora Trent.

"I felt perfectly abashed when you began to talk to me of business in town, with that very business-like air, Miss Craven," he remarked, as they walked on, side by side, in spite of Honor's proud and ineffectual little efforts to leave a space of unoccupied highway between them. "Your tone conveyed an unmistakable rebuke to me; I began to feel overwhelmed with shame at being only 'on pleasure bent.'"

Honor, feeling the incumbrance of unfamiliarity in her new armour of pride, naturally made a strenuous effort to appear very much at her ease therein.

"Captain Trent considers shooting very hard work," she said, with her eyes far on before her, and a general expression of entire ease and indifference. "I dislike him so," she added to herself again, most persistently, and trying to take into her face and figure an evidence of this.

"Then I ought to congratulate myself, I suppose," he said, with a smile, "that this will be for a time my last day's hard work. I am going away to-morrow."

Angrily and silently Honor framed the words in her own mind, "I am very glad—very glad indeed." But for all that, there passed a little quiver across her lips, and for an instant the steeples of Kinbury and the long stretch of white highway were wrapped in heavy mist. Then she spoke with quiet unconcern.

"You must be very glad. Yours is rather a solitary life here."

"Mine is always a solitary life."

By mistake—most mortifyingly by mistake—she looked up to meet his eyes.

"I hope not," she said ; and that was by mistake too.

"It always has been," he answered, very low ; "not quite idle, and not unhappy, but always solitary. Within the last few months there has dawned upon me the possibility of its being different—a far-off possibility, but bright and beautiful beyond my dreams. This is since I knew you, Honor."

"He said you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection." Honor had no need to bring these words from her memory, to array them in giant strength against those quiet words he uttered ; the smart was too recent. Her eyes looked clearly on before her still, and her lip curled scornfully ; but the eyes did not venture to meet his, and the lip curled tremulously, as if its scorn were an effort.

"Miss Craven, I want to ask you if you will come and see my home. Mrs. Trent has offered to visit me, and to bring her daughter and her nephew. I had only to accept their kindness ; but I would plead for yours. They are coming only for one day. Will you let me, for that one day, entertain in my home the only one in all the world who can make the home beautiful for me ?"

"He said you were very well for an hour's amusement, but that any man would be a fool to offer you anything more serious than a passing flirtation."

Once more, with deathless force, the memory came and crushed the power of those earnest words he uttered. If only it had not been just in this hour that she had chanced to meet him !

"Thank you, Mr. Keith, but I think I will not come."

He stopped for a moment in his walk, looking down, with searching earnestness, into her face. It was such a pure and innocent face, so thoughtful as well as bright, so quick to read truth and earnestness, so thoroughly true itself, that he knew he could trust the answer he should read there.

"He said you were not a girl on whom any man could bestow a strong affection." Those words were in burning letters before her wide and angry eyes ; at that moment he looked down and read his answer.

For many minutes after that they walked in silence ; then, on the outskirts of the town, Royden offered his hand—

"It is good-bye, I suppose, Miss Craven. I will not

tease you by again asking you to come with Mrs. Trent ; but, if you change your mind and come, you will make me very happy—for that one day at least."

"You are very well for an hour's amusement—that's all." With those words surging in her heart, Honor answered very easily—

"Thank you again, Mr. Keith ; but there is no likelihood of my changing my mind, so I will say good-bye."

He raised his hat, and turned into a shop near which they had paused, his dogs following him, while Honor walked on slowly up the quiet street. The young woman in the small saddler's shop never guessed how little the gentleman needed the dog-collar he bought. She knew him well by sight, and had often looked out admiringly upon him as he passed the window. He looked very handsome now, standing beside the counter, examining the collars in silence, and she was glad he took a long time to choose one. But her warm heart would hardly have been glad, could she have read aright the sorrow hidden at that moment under the heavy lashes of his eyes.

While he lingered here for Honor's sake, she walked on through the town, clinging childishly and eagerly to one thought—

"He said it ; he did say it. Theodora told me so. It doesn't matter that he does not look as if he would think it. He did say it. Theodora told me so."

The two junior clerks, who nourished for Honor, in good-natured rivalry, a harmless and romantic passion, sprang from their stools when they saw her enter Mr. Haughton's office, and volunteered, in a breath, to go themselves, when she told them, after her pleasant greeting, that she wanted a messenger sent with a note to a certain surgery.

"I will wait in Mr. Haughton's room," she said, "for the answer."

She had no sooner entered the lawyer's private office than Mr. Slimp followed her, with a bland apology for his master's absence—

"Mr. Haughton was summoned to a client who lives at least seven miles away, Miss Craven, and I know it is his intention to drive straight from there, without returning here again."

In vain did poor Honor try to hide her disappointment.

"I suppose there is a train this evening," she said, taking up a time-table with fingers that trembled with nervousness.

"The last train which stops at Statton, leaves at 4.30," Miss Craven," rejoined Bickerton Slimp, with great officiousness, as he wheeled round Mr. Haughton's armchair for her, "and it is now after five. How may I assist you?"

"Thank you, but you can be of no assistance whatever," said Honor, moving away from the offered chair.

"If I may take the liberty of suggesting that I walk back with you," proposed Bickerton, smiling.

"But you may not take the liberty," said Honor, with quiet unconcern.

"I fear, Miss Craven," smiled the little clerk, insinuatingly, as he rubbed his hands softly together, "that I must be rude enough to enforce my escort upon you. Mr. Haughton would never forgive me, if I allowed you unprotected to"—

"Send over to the hotel, if you please," interrupted Honor, "and order a fly for me."

Her tone was quite gentle, and even betrayed a little of the timidity she felt, but there was in it a note of such unquestionable though quiet authority that Bickerton Slimp turned and left the room at once to obey her orders. Whereabout, on his way to the hotel, another resolution crossed his mind, he could not himself have told.

All through his absence Honor lingered at the window where she had taken her stand when Mr. Slimp had invited her to the fire, and some one opposite, whom, in her absent mood, she did not notice, saw her, and presently she was aware that the bustling figure of Mr. Haughton's chief clerk—well known to him—joined her at the window, evidently to tell her something which brought a startled fear into her face.

Prompt in all he did, Royden Keith walked downstairs and out into the hotel yard, from which he had watched Mr. Slimp emerge. A few steps brought him to where one of his own grooms stood chatting with an ostler, and a few words explained his question.

"Mr. Slimp, sir," replied the ostler, touching his hat at every other word, "came over just to say he supposed we had no fly at home just now."

"And had you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Haughton is at his office?"

"He is not, sir. He drove away early to-day. I took the carriage round myself, and he said he should not be back."

Royden walked straight to Mr. Haughton's office, and upstairs to Lawrence Haughton's private room.

"Miss Craven," he said, not noticing Mr. Slimp's discomfort at his appearance, nor seeming to notice how she trembled and shrank back, as if afraid of *herself* now that he had appeared, "I came across to ask you if you will take a seat in my dog-cart. I am sending it"—with the refinement inherent in him, Royden ignored the proposal of going himself—"into Statton, and my man can give the medicine in at East Cottage, and drive you on to The Larches. I am afraid they will be anxious at both places until you arrive, and so is it not a pity to linger here?"

"I was waiting for a fly," said Honor, her quiet voice faltering a little; "they are out at present, so I am watching for one to return."

"There is a fly in the hotel yard now, at your service, if you prefer it," said Royden, without a glance towards where Mr. Slimp stood, cowering a little in his miserable attempt at ease. "Do you prefer it?"

"Mr. Slimp told me—he understood," said Honor, watching curiously the face of her guardian's clerk, "that they were engaged, and I could not have one."

"Mr. Slimp told you so," returned Royden, with calm irony, "but did *not* understand so. You shall go as you choose, Miss Craven. Do you prefer a fly?"

"Yes, if you please," said Honor, a mist of tears gathering at last in her eyes; so like a child she felt just then, because she longed to let him decide for her and act for her, yet rebelled against this longing, tearful petulance.

"Mr. Slimp," said Royden, "will go across again, and this time will bring you the fly."

Not very comfortable were the feelings of Mr. Bickerton Slimp as he left the office, his only relief being the discovery that Mr. Keith was following him.

By the time the fly was ready to leave the hotel yard, Honor was at the outer door of her guardian's offices, but

her heart fell to see that it was Bickerton Slimp who stood beside the hired vehicle, waiting for her. Just as she had taken her seat, however, Mr. Keith came up.

"Is it so?" he asked, closing the door quietly in the clerk's very face, as he was on the point of entering; "is it so, Miss Craven, that you need no escort now?"

"None," she said eagerly.

"I think," he reflected, in his leisurely tones, "that it hardly seems worth while to send my carriage out, now that this is going; and so may I beg you to allow my man a seat on the box here? He shall be no hindrance to you—a little help, perhaps, in guiding and arranging with the driver."

"Thank you," said Honor.

"He is here now, and will be much obliged for the seat," observed Royden, as he stepped back from the closed door and raised his hat. Then, with great relief, Honor watched Royden's valet mount the box before her.

"Stop nowhere on your way, Pierce, even for a minute."

"No, sir."

The fly drove on, and Royden turned away, with just one glance of coolest scorn, not unmixed with amusement, at the baffled little clerk. It was a look which recalled to Bickerton Slimp that (to him) unpleasant evening at the Myddelton Arms, when, after his severe castigation, he had been so coolly followed by those long grey eyes.

"I haven't forgotten," muttered Bickerton, clenching his fists, as he mounted the office stairs again; "and this will make me doubly remember. I shall be more than even with him yet—more than even."

The threat was heavy and portentous, so it was small wonder that the wiry little form snook under it.

CHAPTER XIV.

Thousand serfs do call me master—

But, O love, I love but thee. E. B. BROWNING.

"HONOR CRAVEN,—come with me to-day to call upon a friend at a distance. Mrs. Disbrowe provokes me beyond

endurance by being too ill to make herself useful in any way. I shall be at the station at one o'clock. Mind you are punctual ; I hate unpunctuality, which is only another name for insult. Never mind about your best bonnet, but be sure you have on a clean collar.

“EDNA PAYTE.”

Honor, laughing a little over this letter, went to seek Miss Haughton and beg the holiday.

“If you like to lower yourself by being at the beck and call of every old woman in the village,” remarked Jane, with a not very strict adherence to fact, “I have nothing to say against it. Please yourself.”

“Thank you,” said Honor, her very tone betraying how, for her, the chiefest and purest pleasure was won by pleasing others.

“Going with old Mrs. Payte !” exclaimed Phœbe, when she found her cousin dressed to start, and surreptitiously enjoying bread-and-butter beside the kitchen fire. “Well, I do wish you joy, Honor ! And going without your luncheon too !”

“Yes ; and without the faintest idea of where I'm going, or whom I am going to see,” observed Honor, gravely discussing her mild repast.

“How lovely you look !” blurted Phœbe, unable to restrain her admiration.

“Good-bye, little Frau.”

* * * * *

Mrs. Payte was impatiently pacing the station platform when Honor arrived, and she turned sharply on the girl with a reprimand. But somehow the anger left her eyes when they rested on the beautiful face and figure.

“I don't know how it is,” she mused, half closing her shrewd eyes ; “Theodora Trent dresses more handsomely and expensively, and Phœbe Owen more showily, yet they never look as Honor does ; she is like an exquisite picture.”

“Of course you're late,” she remarked, aloud. “It's old-fashioned to be punctual. Well, never mind ; next century it will be old-fashioned to be late. Now, here's the train. Find me a corner seat, with my back to the engine.”

“What's the matter ?” asked the little old lady, from her

corner seat, as the train rolled on. "Is my bonnet all on one side?"

"No, indeed," said Honor, ashamed of being caught in her long gaze; "I was only thinking how very nice you look."

"Ah, I thought something surprised you," observed Mrs. Payte, with a complacent glance into the window beside her, as if it were a mirror. "You miss my brown hat. I left it at home for to-day. It's against my principles to wear a brown hat in Friesland. You know what happened to the traveller who did?"

"No," said Honor, smiling, "I don't indeed."

"Well, then, you ought to know it, though I can't say that I do. At any rate he tried to go through Friesland in a brown hat, and he couldn't; but whether he escaped with his life or not I really forget."

"What do they wear in Friesland, then?"

"Wear! It would take me all our journey to tell you. Knitted caps; then high silk skull caps; then metal turbans, and then large flaunting bonnets. What's the use of laughing? It's the custom of the country."

"Do you know I should have fancied"—and then Honor stopped, blushing.

"Fancied what?"

"That you," resumed Honor, daringly, though the shy blush deepened, "would have been the very one to choose a brown hat for Friesland, just to show the Frieslanders how little you cared for their opinion."

"Should you?" questioned the old lady, very slowly, as she favoured Honor with a long and trying gaze. "That particularly brilliant idea of yours is founded on the fact of my going to the Abbotsmoor pic-nic in my gardening hat and gown. How very little discrimination children possess! Now amuse yourself; I want to read the deaths."

"Langham Junction! Change here for!"

"Oh, my goodness, Honor!" cried Mrs. Payte, rousing herself in great excitement. "Perhaps we have to change too. Guard, guard!"

The guard came up to the carriage door, too much accustomed to the frantic excitement of lady passengers even to smile.

"Do we change here for Westleigh—Westleigh Towers?"

I don't think this was the name of the station, and yet I forget."

"You can reach Westleigh Towers from here," the guard said politely, "but it's a very long drive, ma'am. This train stops at Westleigh, two stations on; that's best for you."

"We are to be met, so pray direct us rightly," observed Mrs. Payte, settling herself in her seat again.

"If the carriage from The Towers is to meet you, miss," the man said, addressing Honor now, "it will be at Westleigh station. It's often there, and they wouldn't be so silly as to send here, unless it was to meet a train that went no further than the junction."

"Thank you."

"How officious those railway men are!" remarked Mrs. Payte, pulling up the window sharply. "Why didn't he say 'Yes' or 'No' at once, and have done with it? There, don't argue for them, pray. Here are the papers full of arguments—except the deaths. Now look out for our station. What!" she cried, when Honor roused her presently "Westleigh already? Are you quite sure? Make inquiries."

Honor pointed to the name, painted in huge letters on a board above the platform.

"Oh, nonsense; one can't trust those things," grumbled the old lady, fussily. "Ask a porter."

Honor asked a porter, her eyes full of irrepressible laughter. Yes; that was Westleigh, and a carriage was waiting.

Honor looked a little curiously at this carriage when she saw it outside the station gate. It was a long barouche, and the coachman on the box, and the footman who held the door were dressed in a handsome livery of white and green.

"I have—— Where have I seen that livery before?" thought Honor. "Mrs. Payte, have I ever seen this carriage at your door?" she asked, as they drove on, the servants being so far before them, in the long carriage, that there was no fear of the conversation being heard.

"Never."

"Have I seen the servants at your cottage?" she continued, still puzzled.

"No; what should bring them to my cottage? My being met so to-day is no proof that I've a visiting list of aristo-

crats ; don't imagine it. I know no more of Westleigh Towers at this moment than you do ; but I like the owner of it, and when he asked me to go to-day I said I would. There's no mystery about the thing at all. Where are we turning ? Oh, this, I suppose, is the park."

"I—I—wish I had not come," Honor faltered, nervously, as she gazed before her.

For miles the park stretched around them, wooded and undulated, crossed by its silvery stream, and flecked by its roaming herds of deer ; but almost close to them rose The Towers, built in solid stone, and with the faultless proportions of the best time of Gothic architecture ; and Honor's eyes were fixed upon one figure, standing then upon the wide steps, waiting for the carriage.

"Mrs. Payte," she said, below her breath, "whom have you—come to see ?"

"Mr. Keith, child. Don't you see him ?"

"He lives here then, alone ?"

"He lives here, certainly," returned the old lady, with a grim little smile. "As for 'alone,' that's a question I can't answer. I *have* heard something about an old lady who lives with him ; but whether its true or not, and whether, if it's true, she's any relation or not, I'm sure I cannot say. We may possibly see her to-day."

"I wish I had not come."

Fortunately Mrs. Payte did not chance to hear that last remark, for she was fussily preparing to alight ; and now Royden Keith stood beside the carriage-door, and Honor's hand was in his.

"I am so glad to see you," he said, with quiet heartiness.

"Howd'ye do ? You seem to have a house full of visitors," observed Mrs. Payte, in a breath, as she glanced towards the windows.

"Only old friends—whom you have met before."

"Oh !"

The news seemed to mollify the old lady considerably, and she walked placidly into the midst of these "old friends," more than one of whom had stared with a feeling deeper and more dangerous than curiosity, to see her driving up in such style, and bringing Honor with her. Theodora Trent turned from the window, with her teeth tight upon her under-lip.

"For *her* to come!" she thought. "How meanly it has been arranged!"

"Theo, my dear," whispered her mother, startled, "that horrible little woman's sharp eyes are upon you, and I believe she would tell *anything* to either Mr. Keith or Hervey. Don't let her have cause to say you are jealous, my dear. Show your superiority over Honor. She will hardly know how to conduct herself in such a magnificent place as this, while you will show yourself quite at home."

But even this delicate maternal compliment could not soothe Theodora's ruffled feelings, and she had great difficulty in regaining her calm and gracious bearing. She felt baffled and angry, as she had never felt before in all her life. For weeks she had been looking forward to this day; and so strongly had she hinted to Mr. Keith that she should have more pleasure in her visit if she did not meet her own relations at his house, that she felt quite sure she should not be subjected to the mortification of seeing Honor there. Yet now, just when the pleasure of the day was beginning, that odious old woman—with whom Miss Trent never had had, and never could have, a moment's patience—had been received as an esteemed guest, and had brought Honor.

What a day it was! When Honor described it that night to wondering, envious little Phœbe, the description read like a page from the *Arabian Nights*.

"I really cannot tell why it seemed so beautiful, and bright, and pleasant. It was Mr. Keith's doing, I suppose, for after all, the lovely rooms, and pictures, and flowers, and silver, and china, and the lots of servants and space, were not the real cause. The laughter and enjoyment were quite real. Everybody did exactly what they liked; and in the park a band played splendidly all the time. Yes, it was very pleasant, and—I suppose Mr. Keith made it so."

Honor was right. The real pleasure of the day was owing far more to the host than to the beauty or the luxury of his house; yet few of the guests could have defined—any more distinctly than Honor did—how this could be.

"Keith," said Sir Philip Somerson, shading his eyes with his hand, as he stood upon the steps before the chief entrance to The Towers, and looked across to a distant wooded spot in

the park, "there is a string of people passing—quite a crowd. What does it mean?"

"They are the mill-hands," said Royden, "going home."

"What! making a thoroughfare of your park?"

"Yes; it saves them quite a mile, and is a pleasant walk."

"By Jove, you are a reckless fellow to allow it!" exclaimed the baronet, though he watched the passing figures with a good deal of interest. "They will take all kinds of liberties presently, and expect you, I should not wonder, to throw the whole park open to them—perhaps you do?"

"Now and then, in summer-time," said Royden, laughing at the abrupt question. "To see their enjoyment of that day is worth something, I can assure you."

"Bad precedent," observed Sir Philip, vexed to find that his words would not sound so sharp as he meant them to do. "I once threw open Somerson Park for an excursion, and the snobs cut off five hundred of my young trees for walking-sticks. I have kept my grounds to myself since then."

"The cases are different, Sir Philip. They were strangers to you, and most probably *not* the poor."

"I suppose you mean to insinuate," laughed the baronet, "that these poor fellows, with their overworked wives, and children, and sweethearts, would scorn to take advantage of a patron they were fond of? Wait and see."

He strolled away then, with the rest of the company, enjoying a little desultory chat here, and music there; now a game, at which he would laugh as heartily as a boy, and now a grave discussion on a work of art or scientific specimen.

"Mr. Keith," called Lady Somerson from one of the mullioned windows, "that sandy bay would be a favourite resort of mine, if I lived here."

"I fancy not," said Royden, joining her, "for you would soon learn its treachery. There are times when the tide comes sweeping into that bay with an almost sudden rush. It is two miles in width; and, unless you can be quite sure of the tide, and have a fleet horse, it is dangerous to venture there. I once rode home that way from the junction, when the train did not come on to Westleigh, but my horse was fresh and the tide on the ebb."

"You will surely never do that again, Mr. Keith," put in Mrs. Payte. "Just fancy anyone standing at this window,

and watching you start to cross those sands. You know that a couple of miles is not accomplished in a breath, however fleet the horse may be ; and a year's agony might be condensed into five minutes, for anyone watching you from here—anyone who cared for you."

"There is no fear," said Royden, laughing.

"No fear of your riding home along the coast again," smiled Theodora, "or no fear of anyone being frightened to see it?"

"That's it," laughed Sir Philip. "Keith knows that only a wife would be frightened, so, to save her fear, he will not bring a wife here at all. He says, like Benedick, 'One woman is fair, yet I am well ; another is wise, yet I am well ; another virtuous, yet I am well ; but, till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace.' Is not that it, Keith?"

"Yes."

"But will you ever find such a one?" inquired Mrs. Trent, with an effort at motherly interest, and a struggling effort, too, to discriminate between the jesting and the earnest.

"Such a one as whom?"

"I mean—" began Mrs. Trent, in reply, but then halted.

"We all mean," interposed Mrs. Payte, without any hesitation at all, "that we are dying with curiosity to know what sort of a wife you intend to bring to this matchless home."

"'Rich she shall be,'" quoted Royden, his eyes full of laughter as he looked down into the little lady's eager face ; "what comes next? Oh, I know—'wise, or I'll none ; virtuous, fair, mild, noble, of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be what colour it shall please God.'"

"She is to be rich to begin with, is she, Mr. Keith?" smiled Theodora, feeling herself, in that respect, at least, the only eligible person present.

"Yes, rich first of all. It is a word with a wide meaning, Miss Trent. That gong is summoning us to tea ; will you come?"

They saw again that he wished to put a stop to the conversation, and so they sauntered on, talking of other things.

At the far, dim end of the picture-gallery, Honor stood alone, gazing in rapt admiration on a marble statue of Leda bending over the water's brink and looking down with

wondering earnestness upon the graceful swan which bore to her the spirit of the monarch of the gods. A light and faultless figure, with hands clasped and head bent forward, pausing among the flowers on the water's brim, listening, yet starting back a little, hesitating, yet smiling coyly ; pleased almost as if the Olympian deity had wooed her in his own form. Honor stood with her back to the window ; and, through the stained glass above her, fell a richly-tinted light upon the chiselled figure ; so beautiful, she thought, so passing beautiful ! But some one, advancing along the carpeted gallery, saw the rich warm light lie on the living figure too, and gave no thought to the beauty of the lifeless one.

"Miss Honor, why did you creep away from us while we stood talking a few minutes ago ?"

"I wanted to look once more at that," she said, daintily leading Royden's eyes from her face, where she felt the colour rising, hard as she strove to prevent it.

"And you were weary of our talk," he said, with gentleness ; "it shall never weary you again. Of my own will I would not have mentioned that subject to-day. Since you and I walked into Kinbury together that afternoon, even a thought of marriage has never entered my heart. It never can again. You know the answer to all their jesting questions. You know whom I love, and whom alone I could ever ask to be my wife, and live with me in this solitary home. You have told me, Honor, that this longing of mine is never likely to be fulfilled, and, knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine will be. Is it not so ?"

Oh, why had he come to her ? Why had he come just then, when her thoughts were full of him, as they used to be before Theodora repeated those words of his ? Why had he spoken of this again—here, in his home, where, with all his power, he was so gentle and so kind ? Why, above all, would her heart beat even now at the slightest tone of his voice ?

Slowly and emphatically did Honor insist on repeating to herself his speech to Theodora, but even then the old spirit of anger was scarcely invoked with strength enough for armour.

"Where is everybody gone ?" she asked, looking down the long gallery with apparent unconcern, as she moved away from before the statue.

"Honor, I will never speak to you of this after to-night. Only let me ask you the question once more—now in all earnestness. If you think you might care for me at some future time, tell me to wait, and I will ask you again. Seven years' waiting would be nothing to me, if, at the end of the seven years you could lay your hand in mine, and say you loved me then and would be my wife. Waiting ! How could I think *waiting* hard," said Royden, drawing his hand wearily across his brow, "when, if you say 'No' to me to-night, all the years I have to live will be but waiting years?"

"She does very well for an hour's amusement, but no man could bestow on her a strong affection."

The unforgotten words started out clearly and distinctly before Honor's mental eyes. *He* to speak so of her, and then to mock her with this question !

"I wonder where Mrs. Payte can be," she said, with the greatest nonchalance. "Don't let us talk on this subject any more, please, Mr. Keith. Where are we going now ?"

"Downstairs, where they are having tea—if you like."

"Yes ; I like anywhere where other people are. I am tired of being alone."

"And with me."

Honor's heart beat with a strange, sudden pain ; born of the consciousness that all real weariness would lie on the paths he did not tread with her. But it was better so ; besides, it was too late now ; and he *had* said those terrible things of her to Theodora.

Despite these thoughts—perhaps, indeed, owing to these thoughts—Honor was one of the merriest of Mr. Keith's guests during that sociable and luxurious tea ; and Theodora's eyebrows were so constantly raised in supercilious astonishment that Mrs. Payte whispered to Honor a serious doubt as to whether they could ever again assume their original position.

"She has a hundred extra airs and graces on to-night. She would have no objection to reign as mistress in such a place as this, Honor ; but I hope he will not choose her. Come, are you ready ? We have stayed late enough."

"I am ready—quite ready," the girl said, almost eagerly.

"I have enjoyed this day very much," observed the old lady while she put on her bonnet, and Honor stood waiting

for her in the warm and beautiful chamber. "Mr. Keith has made it very pleasant, but then of course any wealthy man could. *L'argent fait tout.*"

"Hardly," said Honor, staunchly enough now. "Everyone could not have done it, even with the *argent.*"

"Don't argue, child. I'm generalising. *Il y a façots et façots.* I know that; but I'm accustomed to say what I mean. Even if Captain Trent had been our wealthy host to-day, wouldn't he have made us all happy?"

Honor laughed merrily.

"At any rate he would not have made us unhappy," she said, her thoughts flying from him to the one who had the greater power.

"No; and I can tell you he chooses a good safe part. It's far easier not to act at all, than to act well; and he's pretty safe. Now come down."

The maid-servant, who had lingered at the door when Mrs. Payte declined her services, led them downstairs again to the great hall, and then disappeared. One moment afterwards Honor missed her handkerchief; and turning unobserved, she ran lightly up the stairs again. She could easily, she fancied, find her way to the room she had just quitted; but, when she reached the gallery from which the chamber door opened, she paused, forgetting whether the maid had led them towards the right or left.

"I think I remember," she said to herself, presently, and hurried to the right. "Certainly this was the outer door."

It was a red cloth door, and moved on a noiseless spring. Stepping through, Honor found herself in a small ante-room, and, opposite her, another door stood open. For a few breathless seconds Honor stood rooted to the spot, gazing fixedly through this door into the room beyond; an elegantly and luxuriously-furnished room, with books and music and ornaments in profusion, with soft beautiful work scattered about, and flowers in a perfect wealth of loveliness. But Honor's eyes dwelt only upon a figure which stood within her sight upon the hearth, dressed in girlish white. A lady, young and very pale and fragile-looking, but with the light of some happy, tender thought upon her face.

"It is—her home," felt Honor, gliding from the room with her hands locked in an agony of which she was just

then unconscious ; "and she is thinking of him. What a long, loving, happy thought it—was !"

Swiftly and lightly retracing her steps, Honor saw her handkerchief at last, and stooped to pick it up. Then she joined Mrs. Payte once more, and no one guessed what pain lay at the girl's heart.

"Good-bye," said Royden, as he stood at the carriage door in the gathering darkness.

"Good-bye," she said, with one long glance into his face, reading it with piteous earnestness, there in the fading light, and finding no shade of sin or shame upon it. "Good-bye."

"Well, I must say," observed Mrs. Payte, breaking in upon Honor's silence as they drove to the station, "I expected the old aunt, or great-aunt, or grandmother, or whatever she may be, would have shown herself to-day, to do the honours to lady-guests. She can surely have no reason for keeping herself hidden, like that wife of Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's novel. What made you start, child?"

"It is cold," said Honor, drawing her shawl about her, and shrinking a little in her corner of the carriage.

"Humph, you're not generally a cold subject," retorted the old lady, brusquely. But she said nothing more till they were in the railway carriage, when she promptly and kindly fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

Ha! ha! It will speed, it will speed, it will speed;
Resistance is vain—we are sure to succeed.

Carillon National of the French Revolution

HONOR found her guardian waiting for her at the Kinbury Station, although Mrs. Payte had left word that they would drive home from there, as the train did not stop at Statton. At East Cottage, Honor waited to hear tidings of Mrs. Disbrowe. Then she walked on with Lawrence in the quiet moonlight, her heart still so heavy that she could scarcely follow his words.

But when she was again with Jane and Phœbe in the commonplace rooms at The Larches, these sad and dreamy

thoughts were necessarily dispelled, and then she longed to put away, with them, all mention of Royden's name. But this she found impossible. Phœbe asked a hundred questions about him and his home; Lawrence brought the subject forward again and again, contemptuously, and yet as if with some purpose; while Jane spoke of him with surly innuendoes, hardest of all to bear. At last Honor, having kept silence as long as she could, turned defiantly upon them.

"You don't any of you know him better than I do, if so well. Then how dare you speak of him so?"

Jane fixed her eyes upon the girl, in stolid astonishment; but Lawrence rose, and paced the room in wrath.

"Your ideas are utterly childish, Honor," he said, trying in vain to suppress the anger of his tones. He has deceived you just as he has deceived every one else."

"That is a falsehood, Lawrence," she affirmed quietly.

"It is not a falsehood," he returned, losing all control over himself. "He is here under false pretences. You are credulous, and fancy him the honourable man he would appear to be. I *know* him to be the very reverse."

"I know him as an honourable man," the girl said, steadily; but she knew full well in what a different tone she would have asserted this before that night.

"You will see," muttered Lawrence, savagely. "I shall have evidence to prove it soon, and I can assert it anywhere."

"You ought not to have asserted it even here, to us, unless you had evidence to prove it," she remarked; but the unconcern now was an effort to her.

"I will have my proof before I tell everything, even to you," said Mr. Haughton, pausing before her. "My news will stagger you, I dare say, but you will know then, as I do, that he is *not* an honourable man."

"I hope," observed Honor, smiling coldly, "that in this search for proof of a man's dishonour you have the inestimable advantage of Mr. Slimp's assistance."

"By Heaven"——

"Hush, Lawrence!" pleaded the girl, grave and gentle again. "When you utter that word so heedlessly, I am afraid to think how heedless your thought of it must be."

"What do you think, Honor," put in Phœbe, hastening to drown this speech, lest it should offend her guardian.

"Mr. Stafford brought us definite news to-day ; we are to meet Lady Lawrence in her London house on the first of December. Don't you feel excited, Honor?"

"This fuss will hinder me in collecting my proofs," said Mr. Haughton, "but the short delay will not signify."

"Did you walk over and see Mrs. Disbrowe, Phœbe?"

"No."

"Oh!—and you promised me! She has been alone almost all day."

"And if she has," remarked Jane, "it does not oblige you *both* to become her slaves. Phœbe is idle enough, Honor, without your teaching her to be more so. How is that? You have two handkerchiefs in your hand. What silly extravagance to carry two at a time!"

"I did not know I had two," said Honor, good-humouredly. "Have I taken up one of yours since I came in?"

"Mrs. Payte gave you one when we stopped at the cottage," remarked Lawrence. "She said she found it at Westleigh Towers, and it had your name upon it; don't you recollect her saying so?"

"Then the other, I suppose"—began Honor. But then she stopped suddenly, with a burning colour in her cheeks. The handkerchief she held was the one she had picked up in the gallery at Westleigh, just after leaving that room where she had seen a lady standing alone beside the fire; and now her eyes had fallen upon a name embroidered daintily across one corner—"ALICE."

"I have brought this one by mistake," she said, putting it back into her pocket; while the colour faded from her cheeks, and left her face, for one moment, white even to the lips. "I was very careless."

"Theodora Trent's, I suppose," grumbled Miss Haughton. "It is a stupid habit of hers to drop handkerchiefs about. Mind you send it back, Honor."

But, in spite of this order, when Honor at last found herself alone in her own room, she locked the handkerchief safely away.

"It will be better so," she said to herself, with a puzzled thoughtfulness upon her face; "better so than have to tell what I saw. It will be quite safe, and no one will ever know."

Hour after hour, Honor lay awake that night, thoughts

crowding upon thoughts, and words which she had heard that day haunting her with unresting persistency ; as words will often do through those night-hours when, if sleep will not come, memory is so keen, and thought so painfully intense.

CHAPTER XVI.

The most delicate of all pleasures consists in promoting the pleasures of others. LA BRUYERE.

THE day was rapidly approaching on which old Myddelton's relatives were to meet Lady Lawrence in London, and the excitement among them was general, though very differently betrayed. Mr. Stafford—Lady Lawrence's lawyer—had been again in Statton, to complete his arrangements for the meeting, and Theodora had made much of him at Deergrove. This excitement helped Miss Trent to bear the absence of Royden Keith, whom she had not seen since the day she had spent at Westleigh Towers. Phœbe's effervescence knew no bounds when she discussed Lady Lawrence and her will : and Mr. Haughton himself could not quite hide or subdue his mingled curiosity and expectation.

"In the midst of all this to-do," remarked Mrs. Payte, rousing herself from a nap by the fire, when Honor one day walked softly into Mrs. Disbrowe's sick-room, "I only wonder you waste your time and energy here. Selina does very well without you, child ; and you ought to be rehearsing what your behaviour in London shall be—as the others are."

With only a quiet smile and nod, Honor passed on to the bed-side, and took her seat beside it ; talking to the invalid for a time, undisturbed—much to her surprise—by the restless little old lady at the fire.

"How do the preparations go on for this grand event, Honor?" inquired Mrs. Payte, at last, unable to keep a longer silence. "There is but a fortnight, you know."

In her low, pleasant voice, Honor told a few particulars which she thought would amuse the sick lady, but they evidently did not satisfy the healthy one, being totally devoid of malice and even ridicule.

"Did Mr. Stafford help you at all, by warning you of any of Lady Lawrence's eccentricities or hobbies?"

"A little," laughed Honor. "He advised us all to dress very simply and quietly, as she is particularly neat in her taste; and he advised Lawrence and Hervey to be genial and unaffected."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Payte, with a chuckle of enjoyment, "that's good! So thoroughly against nature—eh? How will Theodora Trent bear to dress simply, and Phœbe quietly? And how can Mr. and Miss Haughton be genial, and Captain Trent unaffected? I should like to be in the green-room when you all dress for the stage. What shall you do?"

"I? Nothing, Mrs. Payte; why should I?"

"Because you'll be a goose if you don't."

"Then I shall be a goose," said Honor, laughing. "Don't you think Lady Lawrence would rather see us as we are than acting for the occasion?"

"What will she know about the acting? Her lawyer won't tell her he has put you on your guard, never fear. Take advantage of his help, child, and act and dress as he proposes."

"No," said Honor, shaking her head merrily, "for he did not tell it as a message to us. She expects us all to be natural before her."

"But what does that matter?" insisted the old lady, in rising wrath. "He gave you the gratuitous benefit of his experience; never mind whether it is treachery on his part or not—*take* the benefit. If you don't, you lose your chance."

"It is better I should lose it by being known as I am, than gain it by being thought what I am not," said Honor, as she smoothed the pillows for the restless head beside her.

"Well, I don't happen to think so," grumbled Mrs. Payte, noisily poking the fire; "but you must please yourself, I suppose. What dress shall you wear? Not that new grey one with the crimson slashing all about it?"

"Yes," laughed Honor. "That is my best dress, Mrs. Payte; and do you know—if I must own such a humiliating fact—I am rather proud of it?"

"You learnt the style from a picture, I should fancy."

"Yes," said the girl, blushing under the shrewd glance the old lady turned so suddenly upon her. "It was a picture that you and I saw—that we all saw—at Westleigh

Towers ; but it is quite near enough to the fashion not to look odd."

"Odd!" echoed Mrs. Payte, with a curious little grunt. I think you look particularly odd in it ; and, as for fashion, just cover yourself with flounces from top to toe—no matter where you put them—and you are sure to be in the fashion. But what about the others ? It is more in their nature to dress smartly than yours. Will they hide it ?"

"Yes."

"Then you will have a double disadvantage by comparison with them. See what a silly baby you are, rushing headlong against your own interests. Never mind whether you like the old woman. Why, bless me, her individuality is sunk ; she represents more than a million of money—think of it ! By the way, how is your guardian feeling just now towards Mr. Keith ?"

The sick lady, on whose hand Honor's lay, felt the start it gave, and wondered a little, as she lay calm in her weakness.

"He—he"——

"I know," put in Mrs. Payte, brusquely, "he gave me a hint of it one day unconsciously. He thinks Royden Keith is a man not to be trusted."

"He thinks," said Honor, the low, startled voice giving words at last to the horrible conviction of Lawrence's meaning which had stolen by degrees upon her, "that Mr. Keith has at some time committed an act which—which proves him not what he seems to be."

"When ?"

"I do not know."

"Well, I do, then. It was 'in the reign of Queen Dick.' All those likely things occurred in her reign, and when you find it in your English history, we will discuss its events, but not till then."

"I cannot think," exclaimed Honor, sadly, "why Lawrence should ever dream"——

"He never does," was the sharp retort. "Lawyers never dream ; they are far too clever. By the way, Honor, tell us—just to amuse us—what your keen-witted guardian says of us. Begin with Selina."

"What could he say of her," answered Honor, smiling, "but that she was most amiable ?"

"Bah! To say a woman is amiable is to deny her any character at all, to make her at once a nonentity in mind, body, and estate. Go on. What does he say of me? I have heard him say that I am a snappish vixen, and a selfish dabbler in other people's affairs."

"He has not said that to me," said Honor, gently.

The old lady's eyes softened a little, but there was certainly no softening in her next speech.

"I dare say he is saying it now to somebody. At any rate I heard him say it to Theodora Trent. What a good thing it would be if we had her here now, to nurse Selina! She would be a nice one by a sick bed, eh? I should like," continued the little lady, warming her feet busily by turns upon the fender, "to take an Asmodean flight now, and look down through one or two roofs."

"Why?" asked Honor, in amusement, whilst even Mrs. Disbrowe, having caught the quick words, smiled a little.

"Now then, child," retorted Mrs. Payte, without answering the last question, "what are you poking about for? It is no use putting things ready to her hand—either books or flowers or scent. Bless you, Selina never raises a finger to help herself! What in the world is it you are looking as if you wanted now, Selina?"

"Nothing," said the sick lady, in her low soft tones, and with no appearance of resenting the harsh questions of her companion.

"Nothing!" echoed Mrs. Payte, with supreme contempt. "Mysterious nothing! How shall I define thy shapeless, baseless, placeless emptiness? Some poet or professor says that, and I'm no wiser than he, and cannot give you what I cannot define, and what has no shape nor base nor place. Where are you going, Honor?"

"I shall not be many minutes," the girl said, as she looked round, to be sure that the invalid could miss nothing. "I am only going to see Marie."

"Don't be long. Don't waste your time there."

The little kitchen, where Marie lay on the poor couch before the fire, was clean and neat in its bareness, and the French girl's pinched face lay upon a snowy pillow. The pillow was a present from Honor herself, but the whiteness and purity of everything were Marie's own.

"Have you had any dinner, Marie?" asked Honor, gently drawing the fine lace-work from the girl's wasted fingers.

"I did not want any to-day, Miss Craven; and I did not care to leave my work."

"You work too constantly," said Honor, as she laid it aside. "Your father tells me you are at it at five o'clock in the morning, and never leave off until bed-time. It is too much, Marie. Now chat with me, while I get you a cup of tea."

Moving brightly about the little kitchen, Honor prepared the meal with a deftness which put a happy amusement into the sick girl's tired eyes; and—watching her, and listening to her, and talking to her, as Honor led her on to do—she forgot her pain and weakness, and even her constant labour and poverty. So when the tea was ready and Honor sat at the table and waited on her, chatting as if she would not give time to think, Marie caught herself actually laughing.

"Does Mrs. Payte's servant help you a little now?" inquired Honor, when at last she rose to take her leave.

"Yes, she does indeed, Miss Craven—a little. She is growing rather kind to me; but Mrs. Payte—is she not odd? I can never understand her."

"No, it is not easy indeed," smiled Honor. "When will your father be home, Marie?"

"Oh! he is away, Miss Honor. Did you not know?"

"Indeed I did not."

"I thought you would, Miss Craven; because he was sent for by Mr. Keith a week ago."

Marie made a pause here, without knowing it, wondering at the softened brightness of Honor's eyes.

"A week ago, Miss Craven, he read an advertisement for a photographer's assistant, a long way off—more than thirty miles—and father fancied he might do, because he understands his work so well; so he managed to get the money for his railway ticket, and he went. They—they told him, before they asked him a single question, Miss Honor, that he was too old; and so he walked home, for he had no other ticket. It was quite the middle of the night when he came in here, so jaded and white I hardly knew him, and his boots all worn to the ground."

"Then where is he now, Marie?" asked Honor, her eyes dim with pity.

"Now, Miss Honor," the girl said, in a brighter tone, he is at Westl igh Towers. Mr. Keith seemed to have heard of his disappointment, though father himself did not know how, and the very next day he sent for father to go over there with his camera, as he wanted several photographs taken, and father was to go prepared to stay for a time. Oh ! Miss Honor, he was just like a boy that day, and—and yet was ashamed before me of being so happy because—poor father !—*I* was not going. As if it was not more to me than going myself, for him to go ! Miss Honor," added the girl presently, seeing the tears slowly gather in Honor's beautiful eyes, "father sent me a likeness of Mr. Keith. Perhaps he ought not to have done it, but he did ; he knew I should not show it about, but keep it sacredly, and value it, so he sent it. Will you see it, Miss Craven ?"

"No, thank you, Marie," said Honor, quietly.

"Oh, do !" urged Marie, drawing the photograph from between the leaves of a book which lay beside her on the couch, and unfolding it from its silver paper. "Do look, Miss Honor. I think father has taken it beautifully."

So Honor took the picture in her hands, but it was many minutes before the figure grew distinct before her misty eyes. The photograph had evidently included Royden without his knowledge. He was sitting in deep thought, his eyes fixed gravely on the fire, his dogs lying about the rug at his feet.

To one who did not know him, it was the photograph of a very handsome man, thoroughly artistic in the unconscious grace of attitude. But to one who knew him, it was far more than that. To Honor, the face, in its thought and patience, and yet in its power and strength, for that minute seemed to be really with her.

"Well, Honor, how much longer are you going to stay here ?"

She gave back the likeness with a stifled sigh, yet was glad to be called away before she could speak of it.

"I am coming, Mrs. Payte, in one minute."

The little old lady was pausing at the kitchen door, evidently considering that to tread beyond the threshold would contaminate her, and holding her handkerchief to her nose, as if the air of the clean little room were poisonous.

"That lazy girl always detains you when you come here."

she grumbled, holding her shabby brown dress about her ankles, lest the floor should sully it. "She never exerts herself for anyone; why should you exert yourself for her?"

"Mrs. Payte," cried Honor, her eyes brilliant with sudden passion, "you are unjust, and I will not listen to such words of Marie in her helplessness and her pain. She never detains me. I stay here because I like to stay. I am very glad when I can stay with her, and it does me good, because she is so patient and so gentle. She would exert herself for everyone, if she were able, and be far more useful to me, if I were ill, than ever I have been to her."

The little old lady in the doorway had dropped her dress, and was breathing the plebeian air in gasps. She had seen a flash of Honor's anger before, but never passionately roused as now. And to hear her class herself so humbly with that poor creature! How beautiful she looked, too, with one hand lying gently on the head of the sick girl!

"You don't look at all likely to be ill," chuckled the old lady, "so how can we judge? Are you coming now?"

"I will follow you," said Honor.

Left again, she stooped beside the couch and comforted Marie, who was trembling still in her nervous fear. Then, when she had brought a smile at last to the pallid, troubled face, she rose to go. Mrs. Payte met her fiercely in the doorway of Mrs. Disbrowe's room.

"Do you recall all you said to me before that woman?"

"I am very sorry I spoke so hastily," said Honor; "but I cannot recall a single word I said."

"Very well," retorted the old lady, turning swiftly away, "don't! Are you going home now?"

"Not unless you wish it. I have an hour's liberty still. Will you let me stay?"

"Oh, stay, by all means, or I shall be favoured with Selina's groans all the evening. What does the doctor say about that girl downstairs? Will she get well?"

"I fear not," said Honor, pitifully. "He says she needs care and rest, and ease and nourishment; and all these things, we know, are beyond her reach."

"He orders her port wine, I suppose, and beef and mutton—doctors always do when their patients are poor. If you can stay, child, I'll make a call or two."

"Honor," said Mrs. Disbrowe, smiling, when the restless little old lady had bustled out of the room, "hard as she is herself, she takes care that her servant shall help that poor girl; and now, I dare say, nourishing things will be sent in to her. Edna is very strange, but I understand her."

Honor, almost unconsciously, breathed a sigh of relief. The one great pain, to her generous and compassionate nature, was the feeling that this patient invalid had, for her only companion, one who was so hard and cross and dissatisfied. To know that this thought need not harass her now, was a relief indeed; and for the remainder of her stay at East Cottage she was as bright as one of those rare sunbeams which looked in now and then at the calm, submissive face upon the pillows.

CHAPTER XVII.

But t'other young maiden looked sly at me,
And from her seat she ris'n;
Let's you and I go our own way
And we'll let she go shis'n.

Berkshire Ditty.

"MRS. PAYTE." Mrs. Trent's eyes turned languidly to her drawing-room door, when this visitor was announced that afternoon, but she made no advance to meet her.

"A cold day," she remarked, indifferently, as she touched the little old lady's hand with her soft fingers.

"Cold, is it?" returned Mrs. Payte, looking inquisitively at Theodora, who was making an elaborate process of collecting her wools before she rose. "I did not notice. I feel hot enough myself, for I have been put out."

Utter silence. Such a plain hint that the feelings and temperature of Mrs. Edna Payte were matters of supreme indifference to the ladies at Deergrove, that the bold little visitor herself for a moment was nonplussed—only for a moment, though.

"Yes; I have been put out," she resumed, sitting—for her—unusually still, but making strenuous use of her eyes, "by Honor Craven."

"Indeed!"

A faint and languid sign of interest at last.

"She is at my house now, dancing attendance, forsooth, upon my sick friend ; but it is not that nonsense which put me out. It is her ridiculous determination not to make any effort to be agreeable to Lady Lawrence when she arrives. Bless me, why should one of the family—however insignificant a one—retire, and leave greater chance to the others ? "

"Why indeed ? "

This was all Theodora could say, in the very decided pause which the rapid little speaker made ; but her face was growing full of interest now.

"Why, indeed, as you say, Miss Trent ? " resumed Mrs. Payte, a little more slowly ; "although, of course, for your sake I could almost wish that Honor would persist in her absurdity, even so far as declining to go up to London *at all* to meet her ladyship ; because, if that were the case—I saw that it struck you just now—you would have everything your own way. Lady Lawrence would hardly hesitate to choose you before either Miss Haughton or Miss Owen."

"I think," put in Mrs. Trent, "that my daughter has little to fear from the rivalry of any other member of our family."

"I think not—oh, I certainly think not," returned Mrs. Payte, with prompt decision. "But then what can we tell of the eccentricities of old Myddelton's sister ? At any rate, all that I have to say in the matter I have said now. I determined to tell you, because you have always been so very wishful to help Honor—she being your youngest relative, and an orphan."

A pause again, so definite that Mrs. Trent nervously rushed in to break it with a clear and stiff "Oh, certainly."

"Yes," said the small old lady, with a quick nod. "Well, then, you will urge upon her the necessity of going to London among the earliest of you, and doing her best to make herself agreeable to her great-aunt (if she is her great-aunt, but I really don't understand anything about the connection), that the chance of her being remembered in the will may be as good as yours. I have done all I can do, and I leave it now in your hands."

"Honor is not at all likely to forego her chance," said Theodora, wishing in her heart that this blunt and staring little visitor would leave.

"If she does, I shall now consider it entirely her own fault," observed Mrs. Payte, almost blandly. Then, to the great relief of both mother and daughter, she rose in her bustling manner, and prepared to take her leave.

"I am grieved to be able to make so short a call," she said, with apparent enjoyment of the idea, "but I wish, if possible, to pay another visit before it is dark, and in these wretched country districts one's friends always live so far apart. Good-bye. Then I may hope to hear a different decision from Honor, after she has seen you."

* * * * *

Miss Haughton had just donned her black silk dinner dress, and was beginning to listen for the sound of her brother's return, and Phoebe was practising a fantasia which was to astonish him, when an unexpected visitor was announced—"Mrs. Payte." The old lady made a longer ceremony of her call here, though she had given herself exactly the same mission to perform.

Jane received it with a strong disregard to its import, and Phoebe (though she exclaimed several times, "Oh, of course Honor must come," and "Oh, Lawrence would never go without Honor," and "Oh, it was a shame to think of it") hardly followed the idea to the bottom, and thought a great deal more about the bow in her hair, and listened a great deal more eagerly for the wheels of the waggonette.

"I feel sure," observed Miss Haughton, reverting to the subject when the visit was nearly over, and the visitor had dropped it, "that Lady Lawrence will make nothing at all of her female connections. She will be, you know, one of the wealthiest—indeed *the* very wealthiest woman in England. She will most naturally select an heir."

"That seems the general opinion," observed Mrs. Payte, carelessly; "but of course I know nothing about it. Only I should say, if she does wish to select an heir, she will be tempted by the brilliant talents and sterling qualities of Mr. Haughton; and yet—and yet," ruminated the old lady, pensively, "Captain Trent is very accomplished, and of elegant bearing, besides having the useful power—like a cat—of lighting for ever on his feet. He too seems to have a pretty fair chance. Well, well, it is of no use our worrying ourselves about it. I only hope, for the sake of justice, that,

when the day comes for meeting this formidable old millionaire, you will all be there. Now I must hurry home, or I shall be benighted. If Mr. Haughton were here, I would get him to escort me ; as it is, I must go alone." And she went, briskly and cheerfully.

"She chose to come alone in the dusk," Jane said, rigidly, when Phœbe ventured to ask whether it would not have been well to send one of the servants with the old lady ; "so I suppose she is used to it."

"They are all in a rare state of excitement," muttered Mrs. Payte to herself, as she walked homeward in unusual thoughtfulness, and with an unusually slow step ; "and it has been almost as good to me, after all, as an Asmodean flight."

"Hallo, there !"

The exclamation came from Lawrence Haughton, as, in the gathering darkness, he drove up close upon this solitary and heedless pedestrian.

"Mr. Haughton, is that you ?"

Lawrence pulled up his horse, and leaned down from the waggonette, which he generally preferred to drive himself.

"Mrs. Payte, I did not know you. It is late for you to be walking alone."

"Yes, it is," was the prompt reply. "Please to turn and drive me home ; then you can bring Honor back."

"Honor ! Is she at your cottage so late ?"

Lawrence was, beyond a doubt, very angry, and he turned his horse without a word.

The servant held open the carriage door, and Mrs. Payte was driven back to East Cottage in grim silence. But she did not seem to mind it much, and her small, shrewd face wore something very like a smile, when the lights of the cottage fell upon it at last.

"By the powers !" she exclaimed—it was a vague oath, in which the restless little woman could safely, and not against her conscience, indulge—"Honor has got a bright and cheerful-looking room up there ; and I declare, she is singing to Selina ! That is one thing Honor does well. Her voice is not a machine, and she knows the difference between singing and executing a song—I call it executing a song, when girls behead it of sense and feeling. Will you stay

here, Mr. Haughton," she continued, leading him into the firelit sitting-room, "while I fetch Honor?"

Barely two minutes had Lawrence sat moodily there, when the old lady returned to tell him that she could not persuade Honor to leave Mrs. Disbrowe, who was very ill and restless, and was soothed by Honor's singing and reading, and even by her quiet presence—"Mr. Haughton must please excuse her to-night."

"I cannot excuse her," said Lawrence, roughly; "she must come home."

"I really fear she will not," replied Mrs. Payte; and fortunately the firelight did not betray her mean enjoyment of his wrath. "She is, as Mrs. Malaprop would say, 'as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.' Shall I appeal to her once more, or had I not better take your consent for her to stay with my sick friend?"

"It is not right for her to stay away from home," fumed Lawrence, in his selfish anger; "please tell her I insist on her coming."

"I decline to tell her that," rejoined the old lady, with sudden, quiet gravity, "and now I decline to urge even your request. I hoped you would yourself think better of it, and now, merely as a polite formality, Mr. Haughton, I beg you to leave your ward here. She is very nobly and very tenderly fulfilling a duty which has fallen in her way. Her presence here is beyond measure pleasant and beneficial to a dying woman, and still she is most unwilling to disobey her guardian, or even to disregard his wish. This being the case, I will not vex her again with the choice, but will myself arrange with you for her to stay here a little time."

It was a perfectly insignificant person who thus accosted Lawrence Haughton; a person meanly clad and dingily surounded, yet there was something in the words, or the tone, or the bearing of the speaker, which kept his angry answer back, and brought to his own reply a chilly but very evident effort at politeness.

"I will drive here myself for Miss Craven in the early morning, before I leave for my office," he said; "you will not allow her again to set aside my order, I hope."

"I will leave it to her," Mrs. Payte said, calmly, as she took him to the door. "I wonder," she added, to herself,

as she remounted the cottage stairs, whether I shall find her anxious about what he said ? ”

Anxious about him ! The old lady entertained no further doubt upon this subject when she saw Honor beside that quiet sick-bed, brightening so inexpressibly those calm, last hours.

CHAPTER XVIII.

By their advice, and her own wicked wit,
She there devised a wondrous work to frame.

SPENSER.

AFTER Mrs. Payte had left Deergrove that afternoon, Mrs. Trent and her daughter sat for some time in silence, continuing their work just as if no interruption had occurred ; but presently Theodora broke the treacherous pause, and put into words the thought which had been busy in the brains of both.

“ What a difference it will make if Honor does not come ! ” No explanation was needed of the where or when, as Theodora knew. “ I never did fear anyone but Honor,” she continued, presently.

“ You never had any occasion, my dear, even to fear her,” remarked Mrs. Trent, not quite liking to take up yet the thread that lay to her hand.

“ Of course, mamma, you will not try to persuade Honor to go against her will ? ”

“ I never persuade anyone to do anything against their will, Theo, my dear, as you know,” observed Mrs. Trent, serenely.

“ And suppose we go a few days earlier than the others—you yourself proposed it once.”

“ Did I ? ” questioned the lady of the house, meditatively. “ I dare say Hervey thought it well too. And if Honor does not arrive until you have won Lady Lawrence’s regard to yourself, my dear, why, we cannot help it.”

“ It will be Honor’s fault, for being late,” returned Theodora, suppressing a smile. “ What shall we say if Lady Lawrence questions us about her, mamma ? We must be agreed.”

“ We can only give the experience we have had of her,”

replied Mrs. Trent, carefully folding the *couvrete* she was knitting. "I could wish we had a better account to give of the poor child. But I suppose she never will improve now. The association with those vulgar people at East Cottage has quite destroyed what benefit she had gained by bringing her into our own society. Even Hervey's patience must be quite worn out. By the way, my love, you had better talk this over with Hervey ; he, too, I dare say, will be glad to be in London before the Haughtons. Have you quite decided about your dress, and do you feel sure you have chosen what Lady Lawrence will like, as far as you can judge from Mr. Stafford's account of her whims and fancies ?"

"Yes," said Theodora, rising at the sound of the dressing-bell. "My dress will be quiet enough to suit her, I know. How funny I shall feel in it, though !"

"Never mind ; it will only be for a little time," said Mrs. Trent in a consolatory tone. "Lady Lawrence is to make her will at once, you know ; and then it will be all right. You see, whether Hervey or you inherit, it will be the same thing. Oh yes, my love, we will certainly be in London first ; for Lady Lawrence will see it as a delicate attention on our part. Mind you speak to Hervey to-night."

"Yes," thought Theodora, gliding up the stairs, with a smile upon her lips, "but I shall put it a little differently to Hervey, for he never is keenly alive to Honor's slyness until I have talked to him a little."

So, knowing this, Theodora talked to him a good deal, and had the satisfaction at last of seeing that Captain Trent grew thoroughly imbued with the consciousness of a real wisdom having directed all her arrangements. He languidly congratulated her upon them, and expressed his appreciation of the advantageous position to which her diplomacy pointed him.

Mr. Stafford had, in one of his visits to Deergrove, unguardedly betrayed the fact that Lady Lawrence would be in London a few days before that first of December appointed for the meeting with her young relatives. Therefore, why should not the family at Deergrove employ that private information for their own immediate benefit ? Lady Lawrence would of course be pleased with the attention, and would be glad perhaps to hear a little about the rest of the family before she saw them.

"I see," observed Captain Hervey, sauntering figuratively out of the tedious conference. "The worst of it is, nothing can be done without one's being so bored over it. Still, of course, the possible result is worth fatigue. No fellow would object to a little trouble to ensure the success which you expect."

"And which you expect, Hervey."

"Oh, as to that, I expect it in any case. The old woman wants an heir, and you don't suppose she'd choose Haughton. No, I expect it in any case; but of course, Theo, I am at your service in all plans that will make assurance doubly sure; only, for pity's sake, let us have no fuss, and, above all, give that snob Haughton no excuse for blowing up."

"Do you ever see *me* in a fuss?" smiled Theodora. "And Mr. Haughton's tempers, dear Hervey, can never lower *us*."

"Except in our spirits," drawled Captain Hervey. "Now this is all arranged, I hope, and dinner ready. As for Honor, I don't believe a word about her staying here over the first of December; she has far too much good sense."

"If she does stay," remarked Miss Trent, "it will be entirely by her own choice. Of course she can go with the others if she chooses; indeed, I feel anything but confident that she will not. Although," added Miss Trent to herself, as she slowly followed her mother and cousin to the dining-room (Captain Hervey Trent objected to a position between two ladies, and never was known to put himself into any position in which he objected), "if she does not, I think I can promise that her coming afterwards will be of very little avail."

It was at this same time that Mr. Haughton, with his sister and his ward, sat down to a silent dinner at The Larches. Lawrence had not recovered the mortification he had met with at East Cottage, both in Honor's rebellion and in Mrs. Payte's unexpected tirade, and he was, if possible, more taciturn than usual. Phœbe, laying it all to Honor's absence, shed a few silent tears over Honor's delinquencies, and made a great many excited, but abortive attempts at sprightly conversation. Jane—laying it, as she laid all her brother's ill-humours, on the weight and extent of the business he had transacted during the day—took her own usual method (even more abortive than Phœbe's) for

restoring his equanimity, and urged him to take nourishment and rest. From these united efforts he escaped, almost before dinner was over, to his own private room, where he generally drank his after-dinner port in the society of his law-books and papers. But to-night he took no book from the shelves, and no paper from his private drawers. He hardly glanced at the *Gazette*, though he opened and cut it. He laid it down upon his knee without having read a word, then leaned back in his chair, and sipped his wine more frequently than usual.

His chafed and angry thoughts were at East Cottage still—a humiliating confession, which he would himself have been slow to make—and it seemed strange that presently they should rush suddenly from there to the hotel in Kinbury, where he had had that one interview with Royden Keith two weeks before. Nor was the reason of their leap quite explained even when, at Phœbe's summons to tea—urged coaxingly through the closed door—he rose and threw aside his paper, with a few muttered words.

“Honor was bewitched about him, I think, and that was half the old woman's doing; though it's hard to see any motive she could have had in that. She shall repent it, though; for Honor shall not go near her after to-morrow. As for him, Honor never has seen any fault in him, but she shall see a vile one now. I said I would wait until Lady Lawrence's will was written, and this fuss over; but now I think better of that decision. I will show Honor that burnt letter. What will she think of him afterwards?”

Phœbe, waiting patiently in the hall, sprang forward joyously to meet Lawrence, because she saw that he came from his room with an expression of pleasant anticipation on his face.

CHAPTER XIX.

Come sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts.
Midsummer Night's Dream.

It was the evening of the twenty-ninth of November, and Mr. Haurhton was leaving his last instructions with his head clerk. Mr. Slimp received the orders as usual, and

pretended not to be keenly aware that this was an extraordinary occasion. But the young clerks below were making very merry over the event, and greatly enjoyed their own keen and insatiable curiosity.

Lawrence Haughton's reserve had been of little service to him this time. There was hardly any one in Kinbury who did not know that old Myddelton's family were to meet in London on the first of December, for old Myddelton's sister to make their acquaintance and her own will ; and the junior clerks in the lawyer's office were not the only men who had betted, in a small way, on the result.

"In other respects, we are booked if Haughton returns a millionaire," said one, willingly laying down his pen, after two minutes' application.

"Can Slimp buy the practice, do you think ?"

"If he bought it twenty times over, he wouldn't buy my services ; nor yours, if you're the man I take you for."

Number Two evidently was the man for whom Number One took him, for he laughed so heartily at the notion of Bickerton Slimp as a master, that the conviviality consequent on the notion even reached the ears—unintelligibly—of Bickerton Slimp himself.

"Good evening to you both," said Lawrence, entering the lower office.

"You leave to-morrow then, sir ?"

"Yes."

"And have no idea, I presume, when you will return ?"

"No idea."

"I'll tell you what it is," was the verdict, as Mr Haughton's waggonette rolled from the office door, "he's in a rage at the whole thing being so well known. He'd give anything if he could escape going to dance attendance on the old lady, though he'd not forego his chance—not he—for any consideration whatever. But, as he has to go, he'd give the world if he could go quietly up and manage the will himself, with no prying eyes upon him."

This being, in effect, a not untrue epitome of Mr. Haughton's feelings, it can be readily imagined that when he entered The Larches, and Phoebe met him with an excited reminder of the morrow's journey, his face lost none of its normal gloom or rigidity.

"We are all ready, Lawrence," the girl cried; "Jane and I have packed everything. Oh, isn't it a good thing that we are going at last? I used to think the day would never come."

"It has not come now," said Lawrence, carelessly. "Whose boxes are these?"

"Mine and Jane's."

"You are in time with your packing, at all events," observed Mr. Haughton, with dry sarcasm. "Where are Honor's?"

"They are not—oh, Lawrence," the girl broke off, seeing how his anger rose when the doubt, which had always angered him, grew into a certainty, "she will not come. She keeps to it, just as she told you, each time you scolded her. She is quite firm, and really means not to go."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs; you ordered her to be at home for dinner, you know."

"Go and ask her to come to me at once in my own room."

Phoebe ran upstairs eagerly. Her guardian had given her a commission, and that, for the moment, was happiness enough for Phoebe. Of course she was sorry that Honor should be scolded, but then really Honor was behaving very oddly, and it was no wonder at all that Lawrence should be enraged.

"Oh, Honor"—meeting her cousin on the stairs, Phoebe plunged into the very middle of the message—"I know he's angry, and I know we shall be miserable, and all because of you. You ought to alter your mind, Honor; you know you ought. You are to go to Lawrence now in his study. He is so angry. You know he said long ago that he would not go without you. It is very selfish of you, Honor, and you used not to be selfish."

"Lawrence never said he would not go, *meaning it*," returned Honor, pausing on the stairs. "My going will do no one any good, unless it be myself; my staying here may, and so I stay."

"I dare say it is of no use our going at all now," whined Phoebe. "The Trents have been there two days, and—and I think it is no wonder Lawrence is cross. Make haste in, Honor, and do say you'll go. I'll help you to pack."

"Oh, I can pack in a few minutes," smiled the younger

girl, looking back as she went on downstairs. "When I have done all I can do here, I can follow you at half an hour's notice. I have no preparations to make."

"Don't stop," cried Phœbe, eagerly; "make haste to Lawrence."

It was but a short interview between Honor and her guardian. She was firm in her resolve, though perfectly gentle in urging it; and Mr. Haughton's anger and Mr. Haughton's advice were equally unavailing.

"I feel," said the girl, with a great thoughtfulness upon her face, "as if my duty lay here; so don't try to persuade me, please, Lawrence."

He did try though, again and again, but to no purpose; and when Jane and Phœbe had become fidgety, and the dinner was growing cold, he came in and took his seat in such evident ill-humour that no one ventured anything beyond a casual and polite remark. Under these circumstances, the meal was a lugubrious one, and even Phœbe longed for it to be over.

"Then you are not going to your own room this evening, Lawrence?"

He had entered the drawing-room behind them, and his sister turned to him in surprise.

"No," he answered, curtly, as he took the large arm-chair always reserved for him.

Miss Haughton rang for wine, which had as usual been placed in her brother's room, and prepared her work with a little greater zest. But, for all her anticipations, it was not the lawyer's presence which brightened the evening, and Miss Haughton would never have been tempted to own whose did. It was as impossible for Honor not to brighten those among whom she might be, as it would be impossible for the June sunshine to lie upon the grass and leave it chill and cold.

Far from avoiding Lawrence, she—ignoring all memory of that scene in his room—won him, in her own sweet daring way, to pleasant, idle fireside chat, and then even to laughter. Crowning triumph, she tempted them all to a game of whist, conducted, it is true, upon most unorthodox principles, but serving its purpose perhaps all the better for that. Lawrence smiled upon Honor's bright little constant

jesters, and Jane thawed in the laughter; she even forgot herself once, and showed her hand across to Honor, laughing over it herself afterwards, and bearing with great philosophy the defeat of her own side.

Altogether the game, though as whist an ignominious failure, was, as an impromptu amusement, a thorough success; and, when tea came in, the meal was no repetition of the gloomy dinner.

Next day Mr. Haughton started with his sister and ward; and Honor, standing on the station platform to watch the train out of sight, felt her eyes grow dim. They had done little to make the girl's home a happy one, or her life content; but still they had made all the home she had ever known; and there was a vague, sad feeling upon her that this first separation was the breaking up of the old life.

The fancy haunted her as she walked on to East Cottage; and, to dispel it, she recalled Phœbe's excited face and manner, and the great expectations of the whole party; mentally wandering on then to the party from Deergrove, who, in still greater excitement and anticipations, had left London two days before.

"It is strange," she mused to herself, with an unconscious sigh, "to think of the great power this money has—and yet how little it could do for some! Think of Marie Verrien in her constant pain, lying awake night after night, coughing and suffering! How trifling wealth must seem to her, compared with ease and relief! And then Mrs. Disbrowe, lying on the border-land in patient waiting. Looking back upon her life, could she long for any power wealth would give? And, looking on, could she see its power *there*?"

"Bless me, child," exclaimed little Mrs. Payte, as she met her at the cottage door, and apparently noticed nothing of the girl's thoughtful sadness, "you haven't really come, have you? Well, I must say I did not expect you."

"I said I should come," was Honor's simple answer.

"Women may always change their minds, and I felt sure you would change yours. Are all the others gone to town?"

"Yes, Lady Lawrence has probably arrived. If not, she is to be there to-day."

"I know. Do you at all realise how foolish you have been?"

"No, Mrs. Payte," said Honor, gently. "I have thought it well over—I did indeed from the first—and I feel that I have done the only thing which I could feel happy in doing."

"Now," retorted the little old lady, fiercely, "you may just as well not go at all. Your going will only be a mortification. I wish you had not been so silly. Lady Lawrence has a claim upon you, child."

"Hardly," remarked Honor, smiling.

"While Selina," continued the little lady, without condescending to notice the interruption, "what claim has she?"

"The first claim now," was Honor's quiet answer.

CHAPTER XX.

Bootless speed!

When cowardice pursues and valour flies.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

HIGH and dark against the wintry sky rose the massive stone front of Westleigh Towers, sombre, silent, and majestic on its height; while the huge rock out at sea, by force of contrast, assumed almost pygmean proportions. Yet a mighty rock it was too, rising two hundred feet above the waves that fretted at its base; a wonderful rock, haunted, in its inaccessible recesses, by birds in thousands—puffins, cormorants, gulls, and curlews,—but never touched by human footsteps.

It had been a stormy day, and, though the storm had lulled itself at last, the shoreward waves came panting in with foaming crests, and chafed the sand and shingle with a peevish restlessness. The waters covered to-night that treacherous bay below the cliffs, heaving darkly in their sheltered stronghold, and swaying to and fro with a dull and muffled sound. The moon was nearly at its full, but over its bright disc the dusky clouds passed rapidly, obscuring totally its light, save in the intervals between its flight. The fishermen were glad to leave their boats upon the shore to-night, and sit and smoke beside their cottage hearth; and the servants at The Towers gathered about their several fires, and laughed and chatted, and forgot the cold and gloom without—a crowd of servants, comely and well-

organized, but rather a superfluous number, it would seem, to those who knew how little was exacted from them by the solitary master whom they were hired to serve.

In one small room in the west wing of The Towers—warm and bright to-night with fire and lamplight—the little French photographer was busily mounting his photographs ; moving now and then to the window that he might look out upon the night-scene when the moon should ride unclouded, and revelling with all his artistic nature in its weird and stormy beauty ; then walking back to his work with a softened step and a look of grateful wonder in his eyes as he glanced round the bright and comfortable room.

“How beautiful it all is,” he said, with a clasp of his hands which proclaimed his nationality at once ; “wild and magnificent without, easy and luxurious within ! Oh, Marie, my cherished, you little guess what a life your father leads just now ; and Monsieur has not said, even yet, that it is finished, this life of abundance and of pleasure for me. Oh, he is good and generous ! But,” concluded the little Frenchman, with a sudden, prompt resumption of his task, “this is idle ingratitude, this dreaming of mine. I have one more still to mount, and then I shall be at liberty for my nightly letter to Marie. Ah, I forgot that negative I spoiled this morning. I must see to that first.”

Verrien took the glass up cautiously, and held it against the light.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, after a long, close gaze, “now I see how it has happened.”

It was a photograph of one portion of the great entrance-hall at the Towers, and at a glance it was evident that the negative was a defective one. True, the carving and the frescoes were developed with almost as much artistic beauty as is possible in a photograph. Every leaf and fruit and flower in the fretwork, and every broad design in the mosaic pavement, were clearly and tellingly defined ; yet there could be no doubt about the picture being a failure, and the little Frenchman's eager eyes had found the cause now. During the seconds of exposure—the real and technical time of *taking*—a door in that part of the hall had been opened suddenly. The whole thing was easily explained on examining the negative ; yet it was long before Monsieur

Verrien's eyes were lifted ; and, when they were, there was a still deeper puzzle in them.

"I—I—did not know," he murmured, to himself, drawing his handkerchief tenderly over the surface of the glass, "that there was a lady here. I do not know why I should have taken it so entirely for granted that there should *not* be a lady here ; it was absurd of me, to be sure. 'There—there—naturally would be a lady here—naturally—naturally.'"

Monsieur Verrien repeated the word again and again with growing emphasis, and yet he did not put aside the negative, nor raise his eyes from that defective part.

"It was a lady's form—there is no mistake about that," he mused, softly and slowly ; "a lady's, and a young lady's. I wonder—I wonder why I have never heard her spoken of here."

Another silent gaze, and then the Frenchman made a rapid, characteristic gesture of self-disgust.

"Is this my affair?" he muttered, in his broken English. "Would these domestics of their own will talk to me of the ladies of their master's house—me whom they treat so well, and who speaks so little to them—and need Monsieur himself inform me? Pah! it is absurd!"

As if to calm himself after this little ebullition of self-reproach, he put down the damaged negative, and began to turn over and admire, for the hundredth time, the mounted photographs with which he had undoubtedly been successful.

"Ah, this is the one, this is my pride!" he cried, taking one up with an extra tenderness in his hard little stained hands. "This no one could have taken better—no one. I chose this aspect of the house, and I chose this attitude for Monsieur. How well he looks! He always does look well; but still I like this one beyond the others. How proud and solitary the figure looks, and yet how beautiful and natural there on his own threshold! Solitary! His life, for all its generous goodness, does seem solitary; and yet if"—

The sentence was not finished, but the Frenchman's sideway glance at that dimly-developed figure in the spoiled negative betrayed the purport of what he had intended to say.

"I will put it away," he said, presently; "it distracts me."

He was glad one moment afterwards that he had done so; for scarcely had he laid it out of sight when the room door

was opened and Mr. Keith entered. He came up to the table at which the little Frenchman was at work, and, half sitting, half leaning there, watched him, chatting now and then in an idle, pleasant way.

"I think, monsieur," said Verrien, presently, the words having evidently been studied beforehand, and being uttered now by an effort, "that I have completed all the views you spoke of; and when they are all transferred—to-morrow, I mean, monsieur—I set out."

Royden, looking kindly and inquiringly into the photographer's anxious face, saw what this stay at The Towers had been for him; and although, as Verrien said, all the intended views had been taken, he answered promptly that there was more to do, and he hoped Monsieur Verrien would stay a little longer.

"Monsieur—Monsieur Keith,"—the little foreigner was standing before Royden, his breath hurried, and his face full of pathos in spite of its dark features, and the tortoise-shell spectacles pushed high on his bald head—"Monsieur, I do not know how to say it. Even in my own language I could hardly say it as I mean it. But I have done the photographs you wished for, monsieur; and if you order more, it is only because—because I am poor, and you are pitiful."

Royden laughed merrily.

"You have not mastered our language yet," he said, shaking his head. "Let me translate that sentence for you. Say it after me: 'Monsieur, if you order any more, it is only because I am successful and you are satisfied.' There—that is what we call correct English."

"Monsieur Keith, will you let me say just one word more?"

"One," said Royden, smiling at Verrien's evident and almost painful anxiety, "but only one."

"I meant to say that, if you had dismissed me a week ago, you would still have been most kind; but now I ought to be sent"—

"More than one, and a waste of time, monsieur. Now for business. Show me what you have taken to-day."

Royden's generous, kindly tact had, by this speech, set the anxious and humble Frenchman at his ease again. Business was to be transacted, and business was his

province. Two minutes afterwards he was engrossed by the photographs, and so excited by Mr. Keith's criticisms, and so happy in his praise, that Royden could hardly help smiling at the sudden change.

"To-morrow," he said, at last, when he had made his guest most thoroughly content, "there are two important views to take, and in the evening I shall be here as usual to see them, and to decide upon the next. Now, Verrien what about home news? How is your daughter, for I saw you had a letter to-day?"

"Yes, monsieur, a letter from Marie herself; she is just the same—just the same, I know, though she writes cheerfully; and she is getting on quite well, she says, without me."

"A good thing," remarked Royden, understanding exactly what the unselfish girl had said; "she will not be vexed then at my keeping you longer. And how are the ladies at East Cottage?"

"Mrs. Disbrowe is very ill, monsieur—fading fast to the grave, Marie says, but quite content it is so, and nursed so tenderly, monsieur, by Miss Craven—as Marie says."

"Miss Craven is not in London even yet, then?"

"No, monsieur."

"And what about Mrs. Payte?"

"Mrs. Payte, monsieur," said the little Frenchman, without a tone of interest in his voice, "is just as ever, Marie says; so I suppose she is sharp, and scolds—she always did, monsieur."

"Not quite always," said Royden, laughing. "Have you news of anyone else in Statton?"

"Only of Miss Honor, monsieur, as I said."

"Anything more about her, then?"

Royden asked the question in so easy a tone that it would have taken a keener perception than Verrien's to distinguish the interest that lay so deep below it, or to detect the fact that *all* the news of Statton centred here for him.

With a pride that was almost comical in its intense solemnity, Monsieur Verrien drew his daughter's letter from an inner pocket of his coat, and began to read aloud one long passage devoted to Honor. The phraseology was ungrammatical and disconnected, and the reader was obliged

to make continual pauses for the finding of his place amongst the small scraps of paper which had been a Marie's command ; but, for all that, the father had a listener who, by his quiet, concentrated interest, increased tenfold his pride in his daughter's literary achievements.

"That is all of Statton news, monsieur," he said, gathering the papers proudly into the envelope again ; "you will not care for the rest, as it is about the garden, and the cat, and some old photographs of mine that she likes to look at, poor child."

A little longer Mr. Keith stayed chatting with the Frenchman ; then, leaving him to write his letter home, he descended the stairs, his thoughts still so busy with those trifling items of news that, when he reached the open door of the room for which he was bound, he paused a moment, as if he would recall his thoughts and chase from his face some trouble which he felt to be there.

It was a beautiful apartment which he entered, not very large, but furnished with exquisite taste and a most thorough appreciation of comfort. Reclining on a low chair by the fire sat an elderly lady in a lavender-coloured silk dress, with lavender ribbons in her cap. She rose when Royden entered ; and though she took her seat again at his request, there was no rest in her attitude. The nervousness must have been new to her, for it struck Royden in a moment.

"Are you alone ?" he asked, gazing round the room. "Has Alice left you, Miss Henderson ?"

The lady thus addressed had no need to reply. At the first sound of his voice the curtains which hung before one of the mullioned windows were moved aside, and a lady came from the embrasure out into the room.

"I am here, Roy," she said, in a voice so low and timid that it seemed hushed in fear. "I have been wondering where you were."

"Only in the green sitting-room, watching Verrien at his work. Have you wanted me, dear ? Have you been ill ? Or"—she had come into the full light now, and stood looking anxiously at him—"frightened ?"

"Yes, frightened," she answered, almost in a whisper. "I cannot bear to tell you, Roy, for you are worried so ;

but still I must, because you can always make it right for us. I am so weak and timid, and you are so cool and calm."

"What fresh worry have you now, Alice?"

He had held out one hand to her when he saw the fear which had overcome her—the fear with which she had not either the spirit or the strength to battle—and she seized it between her trembling fingers, as she answered—

"It is a man, Royden—a man who has been here before. I have seen him once myself, in the dark here, prowling—a small man in black—very small—thin, as well as short, and—he is here to-night. I saw him first, Roy; and Miss Henderson has seen him. I took her to one of the west windows, and we saw him go through the shrubbery; and now my maid has seen him too, and she says he has been here before. She thinks he is a friend of one of the men servants, but I do not. I know he is here to spy. No man would haunt this house but for that purpose. Oh, Royden, what shall I do?"

"Do not be afraid, dear. Show me where you saw him."

With an unhurried step, and a cool, rather amused face, he walked up to the window at which she had been standing hidden when he entered, and he laughed a little when he met her piteous eyes; but, for all that, there was something in his face which, if she had been less weak and anxious for herself, it might have frightened her to see.

"There," she whispered, below her breath, as, closing the heavy curtains behind them to shut out the light from the room, she pointed with her finger, drawing back her hand again timidly, as if afraid of even that slight movement—"There—just passing over the flower-bed! There—towards the back of the house! I saw him quite plainly when the clouds passed from before the moon—quite plainly, Roy, for he had not time to hide among the trees. He is at the back of the house now somewhere; at least, he has not passed back where I could see him. It is the same man—indeed it is—who was here before. He was here to watch us then, and he is here to watch us now—else why should he haunt the place? Oh, Roy, do not be angry with me in this dreadful time! If they find out!"

"My dear," he said, most gently, "why should I be angry with you? And do you not know very well that we

are not going to let them find out? Though there is one thing," he added, laughing as he came back into the room, "which I *am* going to let them find out."

"Oh, Royden, you will be careful?"

"Very careful," he answered, laying his hand for a moment reassuringly upon her shoulder; "very careful, dear, for your sake; and you must be brave—for mine."

"Mr. Keith," said Miss Henderson, coming forward for the first time, her voice betraying her own anxiety and unrest, "would it not be better to move no hand in this? Would it not be safer and wiser? How do we know who this may be, or what whispers may have got abroad?"

"Oh, I know him," said Royden, throwing back his head with a hearty laugh, which did more towards giving them courage than anything else could have done just then. "I know him as a harmless little spy, whose power is certainly not vested in his own person. You have no need to fear, Miss Henderson—do feel assured of that; and, Alice, do not tremble so. Sit here, my dear, and wait for my return. It is just the night for fears and fancies, is it not? But we will set them all at rest. Ah, it would have done you good, as it did me, to hear the poor little Frenchman upstairs talk of the beauty of this wild night, and read to me of a woman who has lived for ten years in constant acute bodily suffering, working hard in poverty all the while, yet who writes from her sick bed that for him to be happy is the *only* longing which her Father's mercy has let her feel. Alice, from such hearts there are lessons for us to learn. Heaven grant we may not waste its teaching when it comes in such disguise."

"You never could," she whispered; "and I am trying—oh, I do try, Roy!"

He answered only with a kind and gentle smile, and then he turned away.

All trace of this smile was gone before he reached the foot of the wide, lamplit staircase, and his lips were firm, and his eyes dark with anger. The "gentleman's gentleman" and the portly butler (who ruled at Westleigh Towers with a far greater and wider despotism than ever its master thought to exercise) were enjoying a glass of punch together before a

great fire in the pantry, when the unexpected entrance of their master surprised them.

"You are wise," he said, in his pleasant tones, as he walked up to the fire. "On such a night as this we have no excuse for not keeping ourselves warm. I want to know, Evans, whether all the house-servants are indoors to-night."

"I fancy so, sir," the butler answered, putting a chair towards his master. "Most of them are in the servants' hall. Mrs. Hart is in her own room, and the house-steward is with her this evening, and the lady's maid, I think."

"And the rest are in the hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do. Draw your chairs to the fire again. I thought I should need you, Evans, but, as Burton is here" (Burton was the house-steward) "I will go to him."

"Shall I fetch him, or send him to you, sir?"

"No; I want no fuss."

If the appearance of the master had caused surprise in the butler's pantry, the surprise was ten times greater in the housekeeper's room.

"Go into the hall for me, Burton," he said, quietly returning the respectful greetings; "I want to know if all the men are there—men and maids, indeed. Find out if anyone is missing, and I will wait here."

He stood before the fire in the housekeeper's snug little room, while she wondered what the master meant, and why he should be anxious to know that all the servants were together. It was so unlike him.

But she had forgotten her passing sense of injury, and was entertaining him to the best of her ability, when Burton returned to say that one man was away—a new servant. He was in the harness-room, his fellow-servants thought, as he often sat there at night with the grooms. Should Burton go or send to see after him?

"I will do it myself, I think," said the master, quietly. "If I go through this west door, you can bolt it behind me."

Pausing at the great arched entrance to the stable-yard, Royden turned and looked round. The wild gloom of the night oppressed him unaccountably, and for the errand he had taken upon himself he had a strange and angry repugnance; yet at that moment, as he looked up among the

heavy clouds and away across the heaving sea, one memory rose and filled his eyes with a warm love—the memory of those words which had been read aloud to him an hour ago and which told of Honor.

The harness-room, to which Royden at once made his way was a long room running at angles with the gateway. A large fire blazed in the grate, but the only occupant now was a young groom standing at a distance from the fire, and whistling merrily as he trimmed and lighted his small hand-lantern.

A few words told all he had to tell. The man the master sought had been there, but had left quite an hour ago. Yes, he often did come in to have a chat, but he had not stayed long to-night ; in fact some friend or relation had called for him and taken him out.

No, the groom could tell nothing more. It was quite possible the two men had gone to the village alehouse, but really he could not tell ; he had not noticed this visitor who had summoned his fellow-servant away ; nor had he cared to ask where they were going. He had only by chance heard and understood that the man had been urged by this visitor to go and make an evening of it. Perhaps—the groom did not know, but thought it possible—they might be in Mat Burke's cottage. Mat was quite deaf and known to brew good grog. Mat lived near The Towers too ; and, after all, it was not very likely they would go to the village public, where the servants from Westleigh Towers were so well known, and where everyone understood well enough how little the master would like to hear of his men sitting there at night to drink. No, it would not be the same at Mat's. Mat was a quiet, honest man, and stone deaf ; only his son's brig brought over a cask now and then, and Mat made a sly bit of money out of it when he could.

Quietly setting aside all offers of further information or personal attendance, the master went back to the house. Ten minutes afterwards, with the fur collar of his long Russian coat buttoned over his chin, he left the dark, wet avenue, and turning into the high road, walked swiftly on against the cutting north-east wind. Royden knew Mat Burke's cottage well, and, in spite of the scarce-broken darkness, made his way direct to it. A torn cotton curtain

was drawn before the window, but Royden could see that the kitchen was brightly lighted ; and he could hear a voice he recognized—a weak, raised voice, the sound of which made him pause for a moment with a feeling of cold repulsion—utter his own name with a laugh.

He gave a prompt, loud rap upon the door, but in the same instant he opened it, and stooping to pass the doorway, entered at once into the bright, untidy room. The sight of three men drinking at the fire was no surprise to him ; but to those three men the entrance of the master of Westleigh Towers was more than a surprise.

Mat Burke rose as quickly as his rheumatism would allow, and, pulling a lock of his white hair, began an abject and long-winded apology for having again disobeyed his master's orders, rambling off into an entreaty not to be turned out of his cottage even this time. The young servant-man from The Towers rose and stood back upon the hearth, his expression a ludicrous struggle between fear and defiance ; but the other member of the trio did not rise at all. He had been sitting with his back to the door when Royden entered, and, after one swift glance round, he had maintained his position, and kept his face turned in the opposite direction. In this attitude the short, pinched figure of Mr. Bickerton Slimp betrayed nothing of his sense of humiliation and defeat, or of the malevolent designs which warred tempestuously within his limited person ; and his narrow, colourless face was void of all expression.

Mr. Keith gave not one glance across at his own servant, and only silenced the old man with a gesture. He stationed himself at the small round table, and looked down upon the lawyer's clerk. A long, steady gaze it was, and, though Mr. Slimp made most praiseworthy efforts to appear unconscious of it, there was unmistakable evidence of its causing him an unpleasant sensation.

"This is not a public bar. Are you here illegally, or are you here as a friend ?"

Several answers and several alternatives rushed through the mind of Bickerton Slimp, when this question was asked, but he knew that, in order to keep up the rôle he had assumed with these men, there was but one answer he could give, if he gave any ; so he gave none.

"As you do not answer, I presume my footman to be a personal friend of yours!"

"I met him to-night by chance," returned Mr. Slimp, with affected ease.

"Did you? Chance has before taken you into my stable-yard, I believe, though it is considered rather difficult of access to strangers. You must have such a very strong attachment to your friend that I am induced to remove all impediments to your constant intercourse. I would not be ungenerous enough to separate two such close allies. As Mr. Slimp values your society," he added, turning his eyes upon the young man, who stood as far back as he could in the small kitchen, "he is welcome to it; and as you have been willing to place yourself at his disposal, do so entirely; for a divided service is a treacherous service *always*. Go with your friend, for I will have trusty men about me, and not sneaks. Now," he added, addressing the lawyer's clerk with easy scorn, "you can pursue your inquiries and cement your friendship undeterred by fear—to which feeling, I believe, you are not quite a stranger. But you had better not trouble yourself to seek *another* friend in my household. A personal castigation, however exciting, will hardly repay you the fatigue of the journey which lies between here and your headquarters in Kinbury."

A retort, laden with threats, reached Royden's ear as he turned from the cottage, but fell most harmlessly.

He re-entered The Towers by the postern door, through which he had gone out, and when he walked up-stairs again, in his evening dress and amid the warmth and lamp-light, there was no trace visible of his anger and disdain. On entering the room where he had first heard of Mr. Slimp's espionage, he saw the elder lady sitting unemployed before the fire, just as he had left her; but the younger one was talking restlessly to and fro between the window and the door. At sight of Royden she started forward, her thin white hands clasped eagerly.

"Oh, Roy, I have been so frightened," she cried; "so frightened; and yet I did not know why."

"Nor do I," he answered, lightly, while with great gentleness he unlocked her strained fingers. "There was no need for fear; and, beyond that, you promised me to be brave."

"And you?" she questioned, below her breath.

"I? I have discovered that one of the servants has a weakness for straying in the darkness. Is that anything to cause fear, Alice? Now play to me."

"I wish," she said, wistfully, as she turned to the piano. "I had not worried you, and given you this alarm for nothing."

"Worry and alarm! I have had neither, dear. Now play."

She went gladly, for she well knew that it was the only means by which she ever could really soothe or even sympathise with him. The elder lady, sitting opposite Royden at the fire, saw his eyes close, and thought he was asleep. She whispered this to Alice.

"You have soothed him to sleep, dear; I am glad, for he seemed tired and harassed to-night."

But Alice knew he was not sleeping, and she only nodded gently, and played on.

"My dear," whispered Miss Henderson, at last, lifting one of the thin hands from the key-board, "you must go to rest, or you will be ill to-morrow after this fear and excitement. Stay, shall I ring for tea? That will rouse Mr. Keith."

Royden opened his eyes, and lifted his head from its lazy position in his clasped palms.

"Were you tired, Alice?"

"No I am not tired of playing to you," she said. "I never am, because you like it. I only wish I could do it better. Somehow my fingers are so weak—like my health and my spirit, Roy."

"Weak, are they?"—She was standing near him now upon the rug, and as he spoke he took up her left hand—"It is not nearly so thin as it has been—I am very thankful for that—but I want to see it as it used to be; I want to see the ring as tight as I remember it at first."

With a sudden, irresistible impulse, she drew her hand from his, and pressed her lips upon the plain gold ring which turned so easily upon the third finger. And, while she held it so, she burst into uncontrolled and piteous weeping.

CHAPTER XXI.

From the bed where now she lies,
With snow-white face and closed eyes,
She ne'er must rise again.

PROFESSOR WILSON.

THE long December night was drawing to its close. A covering of untrodden snow lent its white, hushed silence to the scene. But that hush of death which is the deepest hush of all descended slowly too upon its silent wings.

In one hour more the dawn would break above the snow ; in one hour more the pulse of life would throb again throughout the land. But for this waiting soul a fairer dawn would break, and the fevered pulse would cease its throbbing.

"Honor," whispered the dying voice, "you have been very good ; always patient, watchful, kind ; and for all return I can only pray that God will bless you, dear, in His own way—in His own way—which is best."

Mrs. Payte stood at the bedside of her old companion, firm and upright. There was no abandonment in her grief ; there was even no appearance of the grief ; but Honor knew it was held back with iron will ; and the girl, purposely leaving the old friends together at times, knew, when she returned at their call, and found the restless old lady bustling about as was her wont, that it had not been so in her absence.

"Edna"—the failing voice faltered in its last appeal, and the nerveless hands relaxed in their last clasp—"you have been wise ; I see it all plainly now, though I thought it wrong. I have been a great trouble to you, Edna ; but you have been very good. I knew you best. Honor, she was always kind and good to me ; and now you will comfort her, you will help her, you will love her ?"

"Always."

The word was uttered with all the earnestness of truth, and Honor's hand closed firmly on Mrs. Disbrowe's nervous fingers. But Mrs. Payte only muttered, curtly, that it was better to make no rash promises, and then turned away and stood beside the fire, with her back to the dying woman.

Softly fell the snow-flakes past the curtained window ; softly broke the dawn in the far east.

"Father, into Thy hands"—Honor's low voice faltered, for in the patient, watching eyes had broken the glory of the End. Pure as the snowflakes, softly flying downwards, yet untainted, rose the free spirit to which no taint of earth could ever cling again. Fairer than the dawn beyond the hills, broke, for the patient, waiting soul, the Morning of Heaven.

"Is this"—the girl's eyes were lingering softly on the eyes she had so gently closed, and her tears were falling fast—"the end?"

"For us the end," Honor answered, turning and taking on her breast the drawn and rigid face of the woman who had lost her one companion, and looking into it the while with the steadfast bravery of faith ; "for her the beginning of the bright and painless life."

"Don't touch me as if you loved me ! I have been hard and exacting, rough and impatient. Leave me with her."

Through that hour's thought beside the dead, no sound broke the silence ; no cry for pardon passed the stiff, dry lips ; Mrs. Payte's regret, after all, seemed to hold no remorse for her own harshness. It might almost have been that that long backward thought brought no remembrance of injury to the dead.

The hour had barely passed, when Honor, entering softly, took the old lady by the hand, and led her down into the warm sitting-room, where, though the blinds were drawn, the morning light fell clear ; where a bright fire sent its cheery glow and pleasant hum to meet them, and where, on the breakfast-table, lay one fresh sweet rose, carrying its matchless lesson of the Resurrection of Life.

Then it was, and not till then, that tears welled up suddenly in the shrewd eyes of this little old lady to whom grief had seemed an impossibility, and she turned her face and hid it on the cushions of the couch ; while Honor—in her girl-wisdom, knowing it was well such tears should have their way—knelt beside her, soothing her only with mute caresses, and the silent strength of sympathy

* * * * *

"Don't stay with me, child. Of course I'm lonely, and

of course I'm heart-broken; but don't stay with me, or you'll lose, beyond hope of recovery, every chance of a share in old Myddelton's money."

This was Mrs. Payte's almost hourly plaint, during the days that intervened between Mrs. Disbrowe's death and funeral.

"Of course I like you with me, child; but you ought to go, for your own sake."

Honor detected no selfishness in the speech. She saw that the old lady's feeling of loneliness was unfeigned, and she never hesitated in her own decision. Mrs. Payte had made arrangements to leave Statton on the day after the funeral. She had not quite decided where she should finally settle, but for a time she was going amongst friends. Once away from East Cottage, she said, where the rooms were haunted by memories of her old friend, she should stand a chance of regaining her spirits.

So, without a pang of selfish doubt or hesitation, Honor made her plans too. She would stay with the solitary old lady through those few sad days at East Cottage, see her comfortably off upon her journey, and then feel at liberty herself to join her relatives in London.

"I wish you had gone when the others went," whined Mrs. Payte, as they sat together over the fire on the night before the funeral; "I am sure you are regretting it at this moment. What claim had I upon you that you should deny yourself for me?"

"I was not thinking of Lady Lawrence," said Honor, gently. "I was thinking of Mrs. Disbrowe."

"I know old Myddelton's sister will be enraged with you," continued Mrs. Payte, not heeding the girl's reply. "Probably she will refuse to see you when you do go."

"Then I shall come back."

"And you don't regret it?"

The tone was sharp, and the glance was a suspicious glance; but Honor did not notice either.

"No, I do not—and never shall—regret it," she answered, simply.

Then, to her great relief, the subject was dropped for the last time, and the old lady received, almost in silence, the girl's sympathy and attention during that chilly day of the funeral.

"Poor Selina," muttered Mrs. Payte, as she and Honor entered the cottage after the dreary ceremony, "I shall miss her greatly. There was plenty of good in Selina—plenty; though she was weak and incapable. She was no relation of mine; but still I shall go to the expense of wearing mourning for her when I find myself in a civilized neighbourhood, where I can get a gown made to fit. Till then this will do very well. Eh, Honor?"

The girl's lashes were heavy with tears. Was this the only requiem for one who had been so patient, and loved so much?

"It was very thoughtful of you to put on a black dress for to-day," continued the old lady, "but of course it was unnecessary. Everybody knows that Selina was nothing to you. If they had been at home at The Larches or at Deergrove, they would have laughed finely. Now, child, let us have a cup of tea and arrange about to-morrow. Somehow, I don't care to part with you."

"We will not part until you leave Statton, Mrs. Payte," said Honor, gently, as they entered the sitting-room, and the maid-servant came in to change her mistress's boots; "I shall first see you off on your way to your friends."

Honor drew the old lady's chair and footstool up to the fire, and handed her her tea. True she was pettish and selfish and complaining, but was she not old and solitary? And, in spite of all her harshness, could not Honor see the lines of grief and anxiety upon her face?

Early next morning, Mrs. Payte, with her arm in Honor's, was waiting on the station platform. She had found out that she must travel by this early train, as she would have to change at Langham Junction, she said, and might have to wait there.

"I shall hardly take any luggage at all," she decided; "what need? I shall get my mourning where I am going, and of course I shall have to send back to East Cottage. When I have made my plans, I shall let you have my address. Now, what about yourself, Honor?"

"I shall go home after you have left, Mrs. Payte, but I shall be quite ready to start by the mid-day train for London. I have very little to take. We are not invited to stay with Lady Lawrence, you know; only to meet her there for the will to be made."

"And you intend, after all, to go in that startling grey and crimson dress?"

"Yes, Mrs. Payte; it is my best."

"Senseless child, when Mr. Stafford so particularly said that old Myddelton's sister liked simplicity. Well, it's no use arguing further about it. Where is that stupid woman with my rug?"

The stupid woman—Mrs. Payte's very patient maid-servant—came up with shawls and cloaks, and put them into a first-class compartment with her mistress. She herself then took a seat in a second-class carriage, provided with a plentiful supply of cold chicken and claret for her own refreshment during her journey; and the train rolled slowly on its way.

Honor returned to East Cottage in the fly which had taken them to the station. For more than an hour she stopped to cheer and to help Marie Verrien, who was alone now. After that she went home to make her own preparations. They were quickly finished, as she had said; then the servants (though they *were* on board wages) brought her in, unasked, a mutton-chop and a cup of tea. So, by mid-day, she was again waiting upon the station platform.

"Why, my dear Miss Craven," exclaimed Mr. Romer, meeting her there, "I thought you started this morning with Mrs. Payte?"

"Oh no," smiled Honor; "she went by the seven o'clock train. I am going to London, you know."

"Of course I know; that is why I felt sure you were gone. Why, if you had taken her train to Langham Junction, you would have caught the up express, and been in Kensington before now."

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Honor. "I never thought of it, nor did Mrs. Payte."

"Ladies never do understand anything about trains," remarked the Rector, merrily. "Now let me see you snugly off."

He chose a seat for her, brought her a paper, had the water-tin refilled, and saw that she was well prepared in every way for her cold journey. Yet from that moment it was a miserable journey to Honor, for she could not find Lady Lawrence's address. She remembered having had it in her hand at the station, when she had been there in the

early morning with Mrs. Payte ; she was quite sure of that, because the old lady had read it, and had told her to be careful of it, saying it was of too much value to be trifled with.

When she reached London, Honor earnestly interrogated the porters, and even ventured out to question the cabmen. Did they happen to know what house in Kensington had been Sir Hervey Lawrence's, or in what house Lady Lawrence lived now ?—"Though I am afraid you do not," added Honor, naively, "for she has only just returned from abroad."

The men were willing enough to take her to find the house, but in no other way could they help her. Lady Lawrence was *une dame inconnue* ; but they knew Kensington from end to end, of course, and they would soon find the house.

A tedious two hours Honor spent, driving slowly from spot to spot in Kensington ; but at last her destination was found. Her heart beat fast when the cab stopped—for good and all this time—before a grand and lofty mansion. She had had no thought yet but for her own carelessness and the awkwardness of her position ; so that now the meeting, which for so long had been looming afar, seemed to have come upon her with a sudden rush.

In answer to the cabman's ring, two powdered footmen came out to meet this visitor for Lady Lawrence.

"That is all my luggage, thank you," she said, while she drew out her purse and almost shyly tendered a half-sovereign to the powdered Colossus. "Will you pay him for me.?"

The man bowed, and passed on the money, while an elderly man in black led Honor upstairs, and left her in the care of a lady's-maid, who looked almost a lady herself in her beautifully-made black dress, with a delicate square of lace upon her head, and a tiny apron of fine muslin with black bows upon the pockets.

Almost unwillingly, Honor accepted her deft and silent help. The girl longed to be alone for these few minutes. It was all so strange to her, and so oppressive. In the immense, sombre house, no sound broke the grand and dreamy silence ; and even the very tread of her own foot, soft and muffled, seemed strange to her.

"I am ready," she said ; and it struck her oddly that she was schooling her voice to these new surroundings.

She followed the maid along the corridors, until a gentleman in black, carrying a white wand, met her, led her without a word to the door where he had stood, and, throwing it open, announced, "Miss Craven," in a clear, imposing voice.

At first Honor felt too shy and dazzled to look round. She could only walk on into the high, long room, dimly conscious of the presence of others. But presently, when she was greeted by voices she knew, she recovered her old ease, and looked round for Lady Lawrence. Evidently Lady Lawrence was not there, and she was simply amongst the old friends with whom, or near whom, she had spent all her life.

Captain Trent came forward to meet her with only half concealed eagerness, and Lawrence Haughton watched her keenly from where he stood, though too angry or too proud to advance one step towards her. Mrs. Trent nodded from her couch ; Theodora exclaimed, with an incomprehensible smile, that she knew Honor would take care to be in time, after all her apparent indifference ; Miss Haughton put out her hand and let the girl kiss her ; but Phoebe jumped up and gave two kisses for Honor's one, delighting evidently in the interruption.

"Oh, we are so tired of waiting, Honor," she exclaimed, impetuously, "it is so dull and disappointing. Lady Lawrence has not left her room yet. She did not come at all till we had been here for days and days. She had not reached England, so even we were in good time, let alone Theo, who was so much earlier. She came in tremendous style, rattling up in a private chaise, with four horses and four servants, but she could not see us then, she was so fatigued, and she has not left her room since. Oh, I wish she would make haste !"

"Then I am in time ?" said Honor, really astonished.

"Exactly in time, for we are to dine with her to-night ; and, if she does come in here before, as she is expected to do, you will still be in time, you see."

"Lady Lawrence will decide that," said Theodora, her harsh tone betraying a little of the mortification which had for days been consuming her, "for Mr. Stafford came in

this morning for the names of all who were here, and especially of those who had arrived first. Of course, yours could not be sent at all."

"Of course not," assented Honor, promptly.

"And I do not think," added Mrs. Trent, "that Lady Lawrence will be very much pleased to find that her invitation, and indeed command, has been set at defiance by the very youngest of all her connections."

"Oh, the youngest cannot much signify in any case," rejoined Honor, merrily ignoring the contemptuous innuendoes.

"Mr. Stafford said," added Theodora, "that of course the first arrivals had paid Lady Lawrence the highest compliment; and he inquired particularly why one should be absent. We had great difficulty in explaining your perversity."

"Had you?" questioned Honor, as she stood before the fire warming her hands. "I should have fancied it easy. But how strange you all look!"

"It is you who look strange in this house, Honor," remarked Miss Haughton. "Do you not see how sombre everything is? And do you not recollect what Mr. Stafford told us about the simplicity of Lady Lawrence's taste in dress? You heard it as well as the rest of us. If you choose to forget it, or defy it, you must take the consequences."

"I do not think," observed Honor, looking slowly round upon the group, with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes, "that you—any of you—look quite natural."

"We are trying to please Lady Lawrence."

"But I do not think she wished to see us feigning other natures than our own, or even other habits; so I came as I usually am."

Lawrence rose from his lounge near one of the windows. Ever since Honor's entrance, his eyes had been fixed upon her. The young figure, in its bright and picturesque dress and in its perfect ease, and the lovely face, so entirely without self-consciousness, had come like a charm to him in this sombre room and among these factitious surroundings; yet now suddenly it began to anger him, as the presence of clear-judging truth will ever anger masked deceit.

He turned and looked moodily and persistently out upon the quiet wintry gardens. If this feeling of wrath against Honor were to be encouraged, he knew he must not follow her with his eyes. The influence which, even from a child, her presence had exercised over the hard and austere man of the world could not be hidden while he watched the beautiful changing face he loved so passionately.

"How are the servants at home behaving, Honor?" inquired Miss Haughton.

Honor looked curiously for a moment at her guardian's sister. From her, at least, she had expected an inquiry for the poor sick lady whom she had stayed behind to nurse.

"Very well," she said, speaking rather heavily in her disappointment. "Phoebe, I am sorry to say your bird is dead; you forgot to leave any particular instruction"——

"Hush!" exclaimed Phoebe, ecstatically. "What is that?"

She had arrested her attention in this manner a hundred times before, but Honor did not know this, and so of course she listened.

"I heard a step, I am sure," said Phoebe, apologetically, when no sound reached any other ears; "and I thought it was Lady Lawrence. Oh, Honor, what a pity about my bird!" and for the space of six minutes Phoebe mourned her lost canary.

"Honor, how are the old women at East Cottage?" inquired Mrs. Trent, feeling that any news might serve to pass the time.

Honor told her in few words; then, for a time, silence settled among them; and Honor, from her low seat near the fire, surveyed the group in puzzled wonder. Hardly one of them looked or acted as she had been accustomed to see them look and act, and she tried to make the change clear to herself. Even Mrs. Trent had adopted the simple attire which Lady Lawrence was supposed to affect, and of the whole group perhaps the greatest difference was observable in her. To miss the voluminous silks, the laces, flowers, and jewelry, was to miss Mrs. Trent herself.

In Theodora the change was almost as great. She was a different person without her brilliant toilettes, with their manifold minor allurements; but just at this time Honor could note another change. Miss Trent's patience was

exhausted. The languid placidity had given way to a worried peevishness as a normal expression. Only now and then, with sudden recollection and alarm, could she call back her complacency. But her moods were too uncertain to retain it, and the fretful look was resumed unconsciously.

To Honor the whole thing was a comedy. Jane's rigidly Quaker attire ; Phœbe's studied simplicity—Phœbe, to whom ribbons, and feathers, and frills had hitherto been the necessities of life !—the affected geniality of Mr. Haughton's expression when sudden moments of recollection visited him ; and the utterly unsuccessful attempt of Captain Trent to be devoid of affectation just for this once.

So they sat at their several occupations, in the immense room in which they seemed so few, where the rich glow of firelight fell upon a profusion of valuable Indian furniture, and where the silence was as dreamy as was the silence without, while the December afternoon drew to its close. So they sat, minute after minute, waiting.

"How sick I am of expecting her !" observed Theodora, speaking almost unconsciously as she threw down her work and moved to the window. "Ah !"

But the door had been opened only to admit Mr. Stafford, Lady Lawrence's lawyer. Though Miss Trent's first feeling was disappointment, she could but hail his coming as a relief to the monotony, and she roused herself to engross him. He chatted merrily among them for a time, and cracked various good-natured jokes about his idle client.

"She takes an unconscionable time to sleep off her fatigue," he said, "but I suppose she will really be down presently. She will dine with you to-night without fail. Ah—who comes here ?"

Two gentlemen entered the room as he spoke ; one being Lady Lawrence's chaplain, and the other a swarthy, fine-looking young man, in an embroidered silk cap—a man who was evidently Indian by birth, and who—though this certainly was not evidenced in his martial bearing or foreign appearance—was Lady Lawrence's private secretary. His advent was a treat for Theodora. She was keen enough to detect the signs of "caste ;" and what a relief a little flirtation would be in this tedious waiting !

About half an hour after the entrance of these two gentlemen, and when conversation was getting lively and general in the long drawing-room—though Mr. Stafford, the chief talker, had been for some minutes absent—a slight old lady alighted nimbly from a cab at the door of Lady Lawrence's mansion, and, much to the surprise of the powdered footmen, inquired for Miss Craven. One of them gravely consented to inquire, and, in consequence of this concession, the gentleman-usher appeared again at the drawing-room door, to inform Miss Craven that a lady waited to see her.

"The most curious little person I ever chanced to encounter," whispered Mr. Stafford, happening to return at that minute. "I would not go down to see her, Miss Craven, if I were you. Had she been a real lady, the servants would have been quick to see it, and she would have been shown in here before me."

But Honor rose at once to go, though she had no need to do so. Almost before the lawyer's words were finished, Mrs. Payte herself, in defiance of the usher's hesitation, appeared in the high doorway, and, frowning a little, as if either the size of the room or the glare of the firelight dazzled her, stood there for a minute gazing around her.

"A curious little person," well might Mr. Stafford say; and never had she looked so curious as she did now. She wore still the shabby black costume which she had assumed for Mrs. Disbrowe's funeral, and this was surmounted by a broad-brimmed black hat, for which in June there might have been some excuse, but which in December was ridiculous as well as hideous.

Altogether, such a figure as this must assuredly have startled the select and aristocratic neighbourhood, and such eccentric shabbiness must be a new spectacle to the stylish and immaculate retainers in Lady Lawrence's household. Still, however ludicrous the scene, this visitor's name was announced with just the same solemn and respectful gravity with which the others had been favoured.

"Mrs. Payte."

CHAPTER XXII.

There was silence deep as death,
And the boldest held his breath,
For a time.

THEODORA TRENT turned her back most unmistakably upon that excited little lady, and began an energetic conversation with the secretary, who listened and conversed most deferentially, but yet had an amused twinkle in his long Indian eyes, as if he understood a little more than she expressed to him.

"I wonder," she said, with well-feigned ignorance, "who this person can be who has taken the trouble to seek Miss Craven here? I always knew that Miss Craven was an odd girl, and had odd acquaintances, but I should hardly have supposed she would encourage them to follow her here."

The Indian bowed gravely. Her ladyship would be surprised to find such a visitor here, doubtless, he said.

"I hope," put in Theodora, smiling, "that she will understand it to be Miss Craven's affair entirely."

"Her ladyship shall be made to understand," he answered, gallantly.

Then Theodora resumed her flirtation, with her mind at ease.

"Honor," whispered Captain Trent, "despatch her quickly, for Heaven's sake! Just suppose Lady Lawrence came in now!"

"Mrs. Payte," remarked Mr. Haughton, coldly, "I have no doubt Miss Craven will come downstairs to you."

"I don't want her downstairs," retorted the old lady, with all her characteristic brusqueness; "I want her here, because I have heard there is a London lawyer here. Honor, are you listening?"

"I am listening, indeed, Mrs. Payte," said the girl, who had not only gone forward and clasped the old lady's hand, but, because she saw the supercilious glances cast upon her, held it still.

"Very well, my dear; then I will say what I want, and

you will help me. I found, on my way, that there was a trifling law business that ought to be settled at once, now poor Selina has gone, so I changed my mind and came to London to get it done. Wasn't it lucky that I chanced to keep Lady Lawrence's address this morning when you showed it me? I have got rooms near here, for I must stay till it is settled. I know you will call upon me—eh, child?"

"Indeed I will, Mrs. Payte," said Honor, cordially.

"And now I have another thing for you to do," resumed the old lady, in a lower tone. "I want to find some lawyer—a London man, else I should have appealed to my learned friend, Mr. Haughton—who will do this business for me, moderately as well as wisely. I heard there was a lawyer here. Which is he?"

"The gentleman by the fire," whispered Honor, half laughing, "Mr. Stafford, of whom you have heard us speak at Statton."

"Oh!"

"Shall I introduce you?"

"No, child; I had rather you arranged the matter for me. I don't like strangers. Tell him I have need of a solicitor's advice and services, but that I am anxious not to be led into much expense. Ask him if, under those circumstances, he would give me the benefit of his help."

Though Mrs. Payte might possibly be under the delusion that she was conducting this conversation privately with Honor, every word was distinctly heard by the other occupants of the room, and this was made sufficiently evident. Theodora gave a short, sarcastic laugh; Mrs. Trent murmured an astonished "Dear me!" Hervey muttered a few words, of which the only audible ones were, "'Pon my soul!" and Lawrence Haughton turned away with an air of thorough disgust.

Honor glanced shyly towards Mr. Stafford. If he would but come forward, she thought. He must have heard just as much, and as plainly, as the others had; yet he stood, to all appearance, engrossed in conversation with the chaplain.

"Ask him," repeated Mrs. Payte, pettishly. "He will do it for you—of course he will, because you are a possible heiress of Lady Lawrence's."

"Oh, hush!" whispered Honor. "He will hear."

She moved towards him as she spoke, but Hervey intercepted her.

"Let that vulgar little creature do her own work, Honor," he urged, in a low tone. "For goodness sake dismiss her!"

But Honor went on, and, standing shyly and earnestly before Mr. Stafford, asked him if he would be so very kind as to promise to help "her friend" in dealing with a question of law.

"I scarcely know what to say," returned the lawyer, looking keenly into the girl's face, first through, and then over, his glittering spectacles. But, after that hesitation, he added, genially, "Yes, I will do it, Miss Craven."

"Thank you," she said, with unfeigned gladness, "thank you. You hear, Mrs. Payte? Mr. Stafford promises."

"*That's* a relief," observed the old lady, without, however, much evidence of gratitude. "I can manage now; and you will come to see me? I don't ask any of you," she said, looking round upon the group with inimitable effrontery, "because I don't feel quite sure that I have ever seen you before. If I have, so great a change has taken place that it renders recognition difficult. Honor, good-bye. I will give you my address as soon as I am settled. You are sure you will call?"

"Quite sure, Mrs. Payte."

"And now," concluded the old lady, with a shrewd, slow glance around her, "I will wish you all good day."

She waited to note each separate reception of her farewell, her dark little restless face full of keen observation. Only a view vouchsafed any reply. Theodora took no more notice of her presence than if, just then, she had been a stool upon the carpet. Mrs. Trent slightly bent her pompous head, but did not move her lips. Phoebe said, "Good morning," as she might have uttered a forced apology which she loathed to utter. Captain Trent bowed his most formal bow, and Mr. Haughton hurried through a rough "Good day to you."

The other gentlemen bowed without a word, while Honor walked to the door with her old friend.

"Don't come downstairs," said Mrs. Payte, arresting her. "This is not your own house, you know, child, and you had better act as the others act. Turn back, and let

me go my way alone. Make haste, and you will have the fun of seeing them smooth their ruffled plumes."

At dusk, when the servants came in to light up the room and shut out the fading daylight, the spirits of every one rose, and expectation grew keener every second. This was the time Lady Lawrence had promised to join them, and there was no fear of a disappointment to-day. For the years of anticipation as well as the week's waiting in London, they would all be rewarded in a few minutes' time.

Every eye was on the watch ; every ear was strained to the uttermost ; for it would be hard to catch the rustling of a dress through these thick walls, or the fall of a step upon the velvet carpet.

Complacency had returned now to every member of the family, and smiles were ready to their lips. The influence of this eager and expectant watchfulness had so wrapt Honor too that when at last the door was thrown wide open, and a voice announced "Lady Lawrence," she felt with what a sudden start and quiver she rose, as all the others rose, to meet the advancing figure.

There was not one of old Mr. Myddelton's possible heirs who was not, and had not for years been, familiar with the portrait of his sister, the Anglo-Indian, who was to be the arbitress and distributor of his almost fabulous wealth, and on whose return to England so many hopes were centred. All were familiar with the sketch which had been sent them, as well as with the girlish portrait at Abbotsmoor, and—built upon these—some had formed a fancied portrait of this important dame, in whose power it lay to make them rich. Familiar to all were the portly figure in its stiff, plain dress, and the smooth, sleek face with its low braids of dark hair, its sleepy thoughtful eyes, its intellectual chin, and its wide and firmly-closed lips. Not one but knew this picture well, and knew that this was the Lady Lawrence whom they should rise to meet. So there was not one who did not start back in visible alarm and consternation when they saw that it was another and a very different figure which entered after that slow announcement of "Lady Lawrence."

A small figure this, in a rich black satin dress, heavily trimmed with crape, and wearing an exquisite little lace cap upon the crisp grey curls ; a small old lady, with keen eyes,

a dark restless face, and lines of cynical amusement round her thin, mobile lips.

"My dears, I am glad to see you all—very glad to see you here," she said, advancing towards them, with her small hands outstretched. "I have kept you waiting a long time, and for that I owe you an apology. But I intend to defer it until after dinner, and in the meantime how do you do, all of you?"

If a thunderbolt had fallen in their midst, the family of old Myddelton would have been less surprised, and would have stood less breathless. There seemed no life or motion left among them. On that quivering, joyous expectation with which they had risen to greet Lady Lawrence, had fallen, in one moment, an awful numbness, a maddening sense of utter defeat and helplessness and despair, and withal a bitter, stinging consciousness of what *might have been*.

For, instead of that imposing figure for which they had looked, there had entered the tiny one which, half an hour before, had come in to them in broad black hat and shabby dress, to be disowned, and discarded, and insulted; instead of the stranger they had looked for, had entered the insignificant person who, for months before that day, had lived among them as a poor and unknown gentlewoman, able only to afford cottage lodgings, but who, in this cottage-home in their midst, had had every opportunity of studying their characters, whilst before *her* they had not cared to wear disguise.

It was strange that now, in her handsome dress, and in her own beautiful rooms, all could readily detect the inborn aristocrat. Brusque, eccentric, excitable, she might be, but still she carried with her the marks (and the consciousness, too) of high birth and lofty position. A true patrician was Sir Hervey Lawrence's widow; a true gentlewoman was old Myddelton's sister. And yet to think it should be in *her* hands that the fabulous wealth lay for distribution! Hers—the thin, restless hands of this little old lady, whom, up to this moment, they had known only as Mrs. Edna Payte!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Will you lend me your mare to go a mile?"
 "No, she is lame leaping over a stile."
 "But if you will her to me spare,
 You shall have money for your mare."
 "Oh, ho! Say you so?
 Money will make the mare to go."

OLD GLEE.

LADY LAWRENCE stood beside the couch from which Mrs. Trent had risen. She had not attempted to seat herself, and none of those who had started up at the sound of her name had moved from the attitudes in which their great surprise had found them.

"I see," she said, as she glanced from one to another of her startled guests, "that you did not expect to meet me here. You cannot recognise my face and form with that portrait of Lady Lawrence which you all know so well. No wonder, for I bought it—a fancy sketch, costing something under fifty rupees—because it was as unlike myself as any woman's portrait could be. I meditated, even then, this pious fraud, and I knew the portrait would put you off the scent, even if any chance speech or occurrence should afterwards awaken suspicion. I think no suspicion ever *has* been aroused, and no plan could have worked better than mine has done. I have heard from all of you such frank and undisguised opinions of old Myddelton's sister that no doubt could ever rest in my mind. I never questioned your right to judge of her without knowing her, but I chose not to judge you until I *did* know you; a mere matter of taste either way, and surely we all have a right to our own opinions. I have gained my knowledge, and I fear you are not so glad of having known me before this meeting as I am for having known you. It was not your conduct to myself which was to be the test I sought. I had a wider motive, which you will soon understand. You are very kind to have met me here. I have delayed making my will as long as I think it safe to delay it. I am an old woman, and you know, all of you, how another old woman, who had been my companion for twenty years, has died within the

few months you have known me. True, I am healthy—brisk and active, as most of you have remarked; but a certain old proverb insinuates that a door on strong hinges is not to be depended on. Remembering this, I have determined to make my will without further delay. I shall be glad of your presence, for I do not intend to omit one name; so to-morrow morning, Mr. Stafford, we will be ready," she added, with a merry sparkle in her eyes; "for, you know, you promised, an hour ago, to settle this little legal matter which brought me to London."

"Dinner is served, my lady."

With a certain dignity, which seemed now to belong to the old lady, in spite of her restlessness, she paired off her guests.

Out of consideration for them, dinner had been thus early and suddenly announced, to excuse dinner-dress, which neither she nor the gentlemen of her household had assumed.

Mrs. Trent, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable, not only mentally but (in consequence of her unusual attire) physically too, left the room gloomily on the old chaplain's arm. Jane Haughton, more rigid than ever in her mortification, walked like a pillar in the escort of the cheery lawyer. Theodora Trent tried to call up her old smiles for the benefit of the Indian secretary, but her mind was too full of anger—an anger which was wide, and vague, and directed against every one but herself.

"Mr. Haughton," said Lady Lawrence, her keen eyes moving from one to another of the group, "I will trouble you for your escort; and, Captain Trent, you will doubtless be proud to lead both these young ladies."

There was a curious pucker in the corners of her mouth when she said this, almost as if she knew how unwelcome this position had ever been to Captain Hervey.

The dinner was an elaborate and ceremonious meal, yet the old woman's constant easy chatter, and the genial and skilful conversation of the gentlemen of the house, overcame the heaviness which might so easily have settled on the party. Besides which, there were one or two of old Myddelton's relatives who, in their pride, made a strenuous effort to appear thoroughly at ease; and these efforts, though painfully evident, were not without a partial success.

After dinner, Lady Lawrence retired to her own room,

and her guests seemed all glad to follow her example. It would be less unpleasant to sit alone by the fires in their chambers than to have to discuss together the events of the day.

Next morning Lady Lawrence appeared at breakfast, and again made the meal a social and cheerful one. When it was over, she led the way to the library ; and neither the chaplain, nor the lawyer, nor the secretary, followed her now.

"I bring you here," she said, as her guests took their seats about the room, and she herself appropriated a large chair which stood beside a writing-table, "to hear my intentions regarding my will. Mr. Stafford is with me for the purpose of drawing it up, and he may possibly make that a long process—lawyers always make everything lengthy and elaborate—but we need not be delayed by that. I have promised Mr. Stafford to give him notes of my wishes this morning. In three days' time the will is to be complete, and he will read it to me here—to me and to any of you who will wait to hear it. I have promised him the directions at once, not only because I want the fuss over, but also because I should think it unfair to keep you longer in uncertainty, dancing attendance on my whims. Whims I call them," added the old lady, with a shrewd twinkle in her bright grey eyes ; "but not quite *idle* whims, mind. It is true that I have practised a fraud upon you, but it was with a purpose solemn enough to legitimatise it. I have in trust an enormous sum of money, besides property of other kinds, and this trust is not to be lightly disposed of. So, for this fraud of mine, I offer no apology ; those among you who know that Lady Lawrence, coming in style to Statton, would have found you only as Mrs. Payte, in her nameless insignificance, found you, have nothing for which to blame me. Those who have one nature for the poor and another for the rich—if there should be any such among you—would not merit apology ; so, as I said before, I offer none. I have had good opportunities of studying my kinsfolk's dispositions, and those opportunities have been of inestimable value to me. I am not quite a Myddelton at heart, and I have a great wish that the family wealth shall be neither squandered nor selfishly amassed. I want a pure and generous hand to wipe away that curse which rests upon old Myddelton's money, and

I should like to think that, from the moment I give it up, the good which it shall do will bring a light and blessing on it, and redeem this wasted time and power abused. Now for the items," continued the little old lady, dipping her quill into the ink, and scrawling a date upon the blank white paper before her.

"You can help me considerably here, for I am not quite sure of your baptismal names, and I wish to remember everyone. Of course I naturally should. My greatest difficulty at present"—as she spoke, she raised her pen, and looked quizzically into the faces around her, reading their expressions at a glance—"my greatest difficulty is in recognising you as the Statton friends who were so invariably hospitable and courteous to the commonplace old woman at East Cottage, and so kind and attentive to her sick companion. Still in this change I recognise the compliment paid to the rich old aunt, and I appreciate it at its full worth. Mrs. and Miss Trent, for instance," resumed the old lady, the cynical lines deepening about her mouth, "how could I at first be sure I saw the ladies from Deergrove, who have hitherto appeared so differently before me? But I understand the respect they pay me, and that shall be remembered."

"Phœbe Owen, too. Let me congratulate you, child, on looking better in your plain dress than I ever saw you look before. Surely for such a denial as foregoing your finery for a few days, you deserve some recompense, and you shall be recompensed. Miss Haughton, yesterday evening, for the first time, I saw you bestow a pleased smile of greeting on me. It was at the moment my name was announced, and before you had seen me. I was unfeignedly surprised to detect it, and though it should be the last as well the first, it deserves to be remembered in my will. You, too, Mr. Haughton, were just then waiting with a smile for Lady Lawrence. I caught a glimpse of it, and it made me forget how few smiles you had, half an hour before, bestowed on the little old woman who had intruded into your presence here. You are a clever man, Lawrence Haughton, very clever—I have not lived near you so long without discovering that—and I know that the money I leave you will not be frittered away in any rash, Quixotic manner. As for you,

Hervey Trent, you must of course be remembered too, for the part you play so well is an expensive part. 'Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man as one shall see in summer's day—a most gentlemanlike man; therefore you play well the part of Pyramus.' As for you, Honor Craven—the old lady's eyes swept over the girl with the greatest unconcern—"you have voluntarily forfeited your place in Lady Lawrence's will, as you are perfectly aware. Now, if you will excuse me for ten minutes, I will write my directions for Mr. Stafford."

It was a strange and puzzled silence which held the group for those ten minutes—a silence freighted with anxious thought, and broken only by the crackling sound of Lady Lawrence's pen upon the thick white paper. Honor stood looking out into the chilly garden, conscious of no feeling beyond her great astonishment. Again and again, as through the night before, she was going back to those days she had spent at East Cottage, wondering why she had never suspected any cause for Mrs. Payte's always inexplicable interest in old Myddelton's family.

Lawrence Haughton took down a book and buried himself in its pages, his face as inscrutable as was the face of Lady Lawrence while she wrote. His sister watched him with an anxiety which, for her, was almost eager.

Captain Trent, leaning back in his chair with an attempt at his characteristic listlessness, looked over—with the greatest unconcern for its contents—a large album, which stood on an ebony stand near him.

Mrs. Trent had brought in her wools, and was knitting busily; but in her face there was a curious, restless watchfulness, only equalled by that which glittered in Theodora's eyes as, every two or three seconds, she raised them quickly and surreptitiously, and fixed them upon the engrossed face of the old lady.

It would be impossible to describe the thoughts of any of the group, because over all still lay the shadow of selfish anticipation. So much depended on the words which that quill was forming! Until they knew them, how could they judge of Lady Lawrence, or how could they form an opinion as to their own parts in the past or future?

The ten minutes had stretched themselves to twenty,

when Lady Lawrence put down her pen, and raised her head with a glance which took in the whole room.

"That is finished," she said, in the quick tones which reminded them of Mrs. Payte. "Now let me read you my bequests."

Her motions were as rapid as her words, when she took up, one after another, the sheets of paper, which she had covered only on one side.

"To Mrs. Isabella Trent, of Deergrove—that name is right, I know—I leave one thousand pounds, to defray the expenses of a short and fashionable mourning for old Myddelton's sister. Though I do not suppose she will ever again be tempted to lay aside her naturally expensive habits, I hope this sum may be sufficient for the purpose. To her daughter, Theodora Myddelton Trent—is that name correctly entered?"

"Quite correctly," answered Theodora, in a faint, anxious voice.

"—I leave one thousand pounds, in acknowledgment of the delicate attention she paid me in being here first to await me. To Phœbe Myddelton Owen"—the busy voice paused after each name, waiting for its corroboration, then continued, as if uninterrupted—"I also bequeath one thousand pounds. Her wardrobe is at present an anxiety to her, and this sum will add fifty pounds a year to her allowance, and save her, perhaps, from future debt or trouble. To Jane Myddelton Haughton I leave the same sum, knowing it will be cautiously and scrupulously garnered; and feeling that—to be garnered *so*—one thousand pounds is as useful as one hundred thousand. To her brother, Lawrence Myddelton Haughton, I bequeath two thousand pounds, with which he can speculate (according to a fancy he has) for—his clients' benefit."

A flame of wrath rose in Lawrence Haughton's cheeks, but no one connected it with anything beyond the natural anger excited by this legacy.

"To Hervey Myddelton Trent," continued Lady Lawrence, unmoved, "I leave the same sum. To one who has been so confident of a large fortune, I know it will appear trifling; but it may possibly supply him with cigars for the term of his natural life—and a good cigar, he once told me, was the essence of comfort."

"I think I have remembered you all, save Honor Craven, and I decline, for reasons of my own, to accept her as a legatee. There are other bequests here," continued the old lady, glancing down one of the well-covered pages, "but they will not interest you, referring as they do only to those who have served me faithfully. As to the bulk of my property, and the whole of old Myddelton's money—for these legacies are to be paid from my own jointure—I have now to speak of that. As you are aware, my brother's wealth has accumulated to an almost fabulous extent; and now the fortune, destined for the heir I choose, amounts to more than a million of money, besides other property. You may judge, then, how anxious I have been to return to England in time to choose my heir, and how anxious too that I might meet with one in whose hands this wealth would be—well, would be *safe*, and I can scarcely say more than that. I knew that two of my relatives were young men, and I felt that my choice would lie between these two. I would choose a man of honest thought—so I determined—a man of blameless life and earnest purpose; simple, manly, natural; one who knew the good that could be done with such vast wealth, and would be brave and earnest to do it. So the curse shall be removed, I said, and a blessing fall upon the money which I hold. And if both are generous, upright men, the money shall be shared.

"Lawrence Haughton and Hervey Trent, you know whether I found you such men as I have described. Neither of you has any idea of the true value of money—its highest, noblest use, I mean—or the great responsibility it brings. One of you would save and amass it as my brother did, serving his own ends the while, and using it only for his own purposes; the other would calmly smile and sleep, and let it all melt through his idle fingers. One would tyrannise over the number of hirelings and dependents which such a position would bring; the other would forget their very existence, except as ministrators to his ease and comfort. Was it strange that, seeing this, I should feel that I must look around once more, and choose an heiress instead of an heir?

"I *did* look around, thoughtfully and anxiously, among my women relatives. I saw who would devote it to herself, and I saw to whom another would give it. I saw who

knew no more than a baby that money was not all coined to be spent on women's dress, and I saw who would grind her tenants and servants, whatever number she might have. I saw who was ready to pour into any strange ear complaints of those who made her home, and I did not wish to feel that, later on, just such complaints would be as naturally uttered of myself; and I saw who treated her mother almost as her slave, and I had no wish to choose one who presently should treat me so.

"But I saw more"—the old lady's eyes, which had been bent upon the desk, were raised here, and everyone could see how warm and earnest they had grown—"I saw more, and again I need not particularise. Those whom these caps fit will feel them just the same whether I distribute them or not. I saw the dying bed of my old friend brightened by one girl who had chosen to love us in our seeming poverty, and I felt that I should like my dying bed—I am an old woman, and such thoughts come naturally now—to be brightened just so; with the same gentle and unwearying hands, by the same sweet and loving voice, by the same good and pitiful face. I saw one who was guided by simple duty, and that love which is the truest love of all, in that it holds no thought of self. I tried her in many ways; day after day I made fresh trial of her patience, and her pity, and her love; and she came bravely and brightly through all. Day after day I made fresh trial of you, I would be equal and unprejudiced to the end. Did I not test you all even at the very last, with a faint hope of finding you more kind and courteous here. *You* know with what success I made that last trial. This"—the little old lady laid her right hand emphatically on the last sheet of writing—"empowers Mr. Stafford to will all my own property, minus the legacies aforesaid, with old Myddelton's money entire, to Honor Myddelton Craven."

"No—oh, no—please."

"Old Myddelton's money," repeated the old lady, unheeding Honor's pleading tone, "I bequeath entire to Honor Myddelton Craven."

A long and terrible silence fell upon the room after these words. Honor's face was hidden in her hands; over the others a different passion seemed to pass with every second.

"Honor knew the deception, I am sure. Honor has understood it all along."

The words burst from Theodora's lips in a perfect torrent of wrath. Lady Lawrence's eyes fixed themselves slowly, and rather amusedly, upon her.

"Do not excite yourself unnecessarily, Miss Trent ; it does not become you. Unfortunately Honor Craven's intelligence in this matter was no keener than your own ; and where yours, and your mother's, and Mr. Haughton's were at fault, are you surprised that Honor's should be ? There, that is all I need prepare for Mr. Stafford. Those who wish to hear the will read will stay with me ; to those who do not, if there be any, I suppose I must say farewell—to all save, at least, Honor. She will, I hope, stay with the solitary old woman, who needs her now and here, as sorely as she needed her in that cottage where she first saw her. Possibly we may all meet again. When we do, I hope that old time will be forgotten."

No need to say that Mr. Stafford was never called upon to read his client's will.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As she goes all hearts do duty
 Unto her beauty ;
 And enamoured, do wish—so they might
 But enjoy such a sight—
 That they still were to run by her side,
 Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.

● * * * * * * *

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
 Before rude hands have touched it ?
 Have you marked but the fall of the snow
 Before the soil hath smutched it ?
 Have you felt the wool of the beaver,
 Or swan's down ever ?
 Or have smelt i' the bud of the briar,
 Or the nard in the fire ?
 Or have tasted the bag of the bee ?
 Oh, so white ! Oh, so soft ! Oh, so sweet is she ?

THE entrance into society of the Anglo-Indian millionaire and her adopted heiress was one of the grand events of that

year, when, after a few months' travel on the Continent, the splendid mansion in Kensington was thrown open to the London world, beautified to suit those fair spring days, but retaining all its old substantial pomp and heavy splendour.

The old lady's shrewdness and eccentricities had almost as much power as had her marvellous wealth, to make her one marked out in any crowd ; and Honor's beauty, with that nameless charm of varying moods and girlish piquancy, made her, even independent of her vast expectations, the star of the season.

Although her introduction into the highest society of Europe had been so sudden, nothing in the girl's manner betrayed this. Just as much at her ease was Honor, when presented at Court, as she used to be when she performed the imaginary ceremony in Phœbe's bed-room, stooping to make her dress very long, and bringing down on her devoted head the "How ridiculous !" evolved from Phœbe's common sense. The freshness of her enjoyment, the thoughtfulness that ran below her brightest speeches, the true self-forgetfulness, the total abstinence of vanity or affectation, the perfect impossibility of either spiteful or inane speeches, and, perhaps, above all, her winning, watchful care of the old lady, her bright, exhaustless patience, and her constant tender remembrance of her, were an irresistible charm about the girl, and it was little wonder that hands and hearts were at her service everywhere. Little wonder that introductions were sought as precious boons, and that, in the crowd which waited for her smiles, men of the noblest name and highest rank—with those who had won their country's honour, too, or won themselves a fair, undying fame—should struggle eagerly.

It was in a strange spirit that Honor received this adulation ; sometimes to all appearance unconscious of it ; sometimes brightly turning it aside ; sometimes gently, and almost pleadingly, resisting it ; never proud of it ; never meeting it willingly, and never, above all, encouraging it.

"Honor," remarked Lady Lawrence one day—it was towards the close of the season, and the old lady, after one of her crowded receptions, threw herself on a couch in her dressing-room, and looked up quizzically at Honor, who had just come in, pretty beyond words, in her dressing-robe of

quilted satin, with her bright brown hair let down, and curling heavily and richly at the ends—"Honor, do you regret my decision for to-night?"

"Regret it!" echoed Honor, as she sat beside the old lady, and leaned her head against the arm of the couch, with a pleasant brightness in her eyes, "I will not say I am quite certain, auntie, but I think that, even if you had left the choice with me to-night, I should have stayed at home. It is after midnight now, and we have had a day of ceaseless excitement. No, I am really glad we did not go to the Duchess's ball?"

"Nonsense, Honor. I know how thoroughly you would have enjoyed it."

"I know I should," said Honor, her lips as well as her eyes smiling now; "but I am enjoying myself here too. What a rare thing it is for us to have any time to sit alone together!"

"Very rare"—the old lady's voice was low and grave, but her eyes filled with a great tenderness, as she put out one hand and laid it caressingly on the girl's head—"so rare that it is of great value to me, my dear. Old people need some pauses in the busy march when the evening time is come. The present is not everything to them, Honor, when the great future is so near."

Without a word Honor took the little caressing hand within hers, and held it fondly.

"If I saw that your heart rested only in those gaieties and excitements which I see that you pleasantly enjoy, I would not take you away, my darling, even as I have done to-night; but I know it is not so. Your love for your old aunt is no hollow love. I lean upon it—ah, my dear, you hardly know with what firm and pleasant trust I lean upon it. As little as you could understand, in your simple truthfulness, how severely I was making trial of you last year, so little can you guess what your love was to me when it came so richly and lavishly in my lonely old age."

"And you," said Honor, "can never guess, auntie, what your love has been to me, who never knew till now what a mother's love was like. Ah! no; you can never guess."

"Honor"—there had been a pause after the girl's low words, and Lady Lawrence broke it now with a new tone of

anxiety in her voice—"Honor, one thing has struck me often since we have lived together, and to-night I am going to speak of it for the first time. I can keep no secret from you, my child ; not even this thought of mine, for I know it can never obtrude itself as a barrier between my child and me. I told you I felt weary to-night, and that it was natural for an old woman to do so. It is that feeling—for it comes often, dear, and will not be ignored—which brings me sometimes a great anxiety for you. Only sometimes, for generally I can feel strong and content, knowing in whose care you will always be ; but *sometimes*, as I said, and to-night is one of those times. Of course I could not have this anxiety if I knew I should leave you in a husband's care, but I have noticed that such a thought as choosing among those who sue for your hand seems as far removed from you as if you were a young wife enjoying her first triumph, or even as if you had told your seventy years, as I have. Honor, tell me why this is so ?"

The girl's eyes had softened to a dreamy sadness, and the smile had died utterly from her lips. "I—I cannot care for them," she faltered ; "not for one, I mean, more than others. That is my only reason, auntie."

"The only one ?" The old voice faltered like the young one ; the dim eyes on the pillows had grown as wistful as had those radiant ones beside them. "Is that the only reason, Honor ? Do not wonder at my doubting it—do not be hurt by my suspicion. If I did not know you so well, I might read nothing in your eyes and tones ; but I *do* know you well, my dear, and I can see that the reason why no one, in this new life of yours, has won this heart which is so true, and so worth winning, is because they were too late. Honor, for months we have been separated from that old life of yours, but we will bridge the separation over, if it would give you happiness. For whom, in that old home, does your heart yearn ?"

"I should like to see Phœbe," replied Honor, a little amusement in her low tones.

"Phœbe !" The exclamation was scornful, truly, but the note of relief was audible. "Only Phœbe Owen ? We will manage that some day ; but you know, as well as I do, that Phœbe would rather stay with Lawrence Haughton

than come to you. Is there no one else you long to see ? ”

“ No,” said Honor, speaking very readily when she detected the pain in the question.

“ That is well ; but I think that I never had any real fear, Honor. You would never wed with either Lawrence Haughton or Hervey Trent ? ”

“ Never,” said the girl, in simple and surprised dissent.

A long pause, and the words the old lady next uttered were in a different tone.

“ Honor, how many times, during the season, have we met Royden Keith, of Westleigh Towers ? Very few times, eh ? ”

“ Very few.”

The answer was so quiet and so easy that there seemed no cause for Lady Lawrence's swift glance into the face beside her.

“ Very few, as you say. How many times has he been here ? ”

“ Not once, auntie.”

The answer was so slow and calm that there seemed less reason still for the half-smile.

“ Not once, as you say, Honor. When I was a poor insignificant old gentlewoman, sharp and shabby, Royden Keith always behaved to me as a courteous gentleman ; he was always attentive and generous, thoughtful both for me and for my sick friend, and kind to both. When we lived in cottage lodgings, he spared no trouble to himself if he could serve us ; seeing no shame in being the friend of such as we seemed then ; bravely facing ridicule to make our lives a little less cramped and dull than he fancied they might be. And so patient and pleasant was he always with —— Ah, my darling, my little darling, tears at last ! Yes, lay your head here—think it your mother's breast, my child, fancy these your mother's arms about you, and whisper it to me presently—only presently. I know so much that it will not take you long to tell. Dear, could I have lived with you so long, and so closely taken you into my heart, if my love could not teach me *that* secret ? No, do not look into my face just yet. I—I will wait a little. It has brought back so many thoughts from that far past ; and—and from the future, dear, which may be so near.

Honor, our separation will be hard to bear, but I think its chief terror will be gone when I can leave you in his strong and tender care. My darling, why those anguished eyes? Ah, we will let the story rest to-night, and to-morrow all will be clear and bright before us once again."

CHAPTER XXV.

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike.

POPE.

LADY LAWRENCE and Honor spent the autumn of that year in Italy. The old lady's health was fading slowly, and so they went. It was no pain to either to leave England. Each took her truest friend, and the absence involved no sad and bitter parting.

Since Honor had told her life's one secret to this warm, motherly friend, the two had been, if possible, drawn more closely together. To the old lady's comforting voice there had come a tone of cheering hopefulness too; and this hopefulness, ever since, had moved her on this subject.

"I have no fear," she said. "You did wrong ever to credit as his such absurd words, Honor. I heard Theodora Trent tell you, but I never thought *you* could believe them, because I could not do so myself. But I think that will all be made clear in good time. You are true and steadfast, and there is time."

Such words as these she would say whenever—as only at rare intervals—they would talk of Royden; and such words she had been saying on that last day, when the sun glanced brightly on the waters of the Adriatic, and the fair Southern morning *seemed* to bring health and vigour with it.

"Honor, I could have left you in his care without one fear or doubt; but it is not to be. Still, darling, wait and hope. If you can never give your love elsewhere, I know that you will never wed elsewhere. Be brave and true, my dear, in either life. Remember the great responsibility you hold, and, above all, remember Who alone can help and guide you."

This was the last time Lady Lawrence mentioned her

wealth, or Royden's name; and Honor never forgot the words.

Before nightfall on that day Honor was alone.

Both Mr. Stafford and Lady Lawrence's chaplain were in attendance upon her when she died, and they—with the courier and the servants—took every responsibility and trouble from Honor, yet that knowledge did not prevent Lawrence Haughton hurrying over to Italy the very hour in which the news of Lady Lawrence's death was received in England. For the first few minutes, Honor's surprise at seeing him was a pleasant surprise, for she was in a strange country, in grief, and this was a face from her old home; but after that his presence only added every hour more and more heavily to her grief.

His old unwearying pursuit of her had been as nothing compared with this new eager courtship, which harassed and distressed, and, even in all her heartfelt grief, angered her at last beyond all words. His old pleas were more persistently urged, and his old efforts were redoubled. She was his old love, the only one for whom his hard and selfish heart had ever yearned. She was even more beautiful now than she had been in those old days, and she was marvellously rich—"the richest girl in England," as he assured himself with unctuous reiteration—and so to win her—to win her, while other men tried so hard in vain—he could count no effort—poor Honor!—too mean or base.

So it was that, upon that journey home, when he was, as Mr. Stafford and the old clergyman supposed, travelling with them to be a comfort to his cousin, he struck the blow which his suspicion and his jealousy had threatened long.

It was but seldom that Honor allowed herself to be alone with him, so weary was she of the old plea, but on this day she could not help it. He had urged his suit, of course (what opportunity did he ever let slip?), but he had been slow and cautious, evidently determined not to allow himself to lose the command over his temper. Most firmly, yet very quietly and wearily, Honor had answered him; and when at last she rose to leave the room, the indecision which had caused his mind to hesitate over this last blow all vanished, and whatever wound his words could give was to be given now.

Honor stood and listened, her eyes fixed wonderingly

upon his face, but before he had finished, her cheeks had grown as white as death.

"Why do you say this to me?" she asked, slowly, "why do you come to *me* to talk of Royden Keith?"

"I hardly know," he answered, with an absurd assumption of ignorance, "except that you used to be curious about him. I thought you would be glad to know who he was."

"I *did* know who he was," she said; "I have known Mr. Keith, of Westleigh Towers, for a long time."

Lawrence Haughton turned aside his head with a momentary laugh.

"If you felt sure, Honor, you would hardly utter the assertion so eagerly; and you really believe, as strongly as I do, that Royden Keith and Gabriel Myddelton are one."

"I do not!" she cried. "I never could"—But there the words broke off, and the flash died suddenly out of her angry eyes.

"You mistake your own feelings," said Mr. Haughton, in his slow, convincing tones, "and I have no need to glean proofs for you."

"Proofs!" she echoed, "you spoke of proofs before, when you hinted at some sin you would lay to his charge. If you have any to lay now, bring your proofs. You have none—of course you have not—nor will you ever have; but I ask, how *dare* you assert a gentleman to be a criminal from only your own base, suspicious convictions? How dare you do it to me? These are calumnies built on your own mean jealousy and hatred of one who never injured you! Go from this room, Lawrence; I am mistress here."

He smiled a little—a smile of bland consideration for her youth and excusable petulance—a smile of pity for an apparent infatuation—a smile which brought the passionate crimson into her white cheeks.

There was a pause then, while she tried to regain her voice and ease, and while he, in cool defiance of her order, stood gazing down upon her, with this maddening smile still hovering on his lips.

"You take this information oddly, Honor," he said, at last, "as if you had a most particular interest in Gabriel Myddelton. It would be a pity if you had, because he is a married man."

"Can cousins take no interest in each other if they are married?"

Lawrence, in all his spleen and selfishness, started at these words. The tone in which they were uttered was so heavy with misery that the feigned lightness was almost terrible.

"What is it, Honor?" he said, advancing towards her in sudden fear. "Do you feel ill?"

"Ill?—no! Have you—did you say—proofs of your last assertion?"

"No. No proofs yet, but I shall have them."

"Shall have them!" she echoed, proudly. "Then perhaps your words may have some weight. Why did you not procure them first? Will not one blow satisfy you, but you must wound and wound, to show what pain *can* be?"

"Honor, you ought to be grateful to me for pointing out to you where treachery"—

But she had left him then, and the words were useless.

"I shall never mention it to her again," he muttered, angry with her, but doubly angry with himself, "until I can bring in my hand the evidences of his guilt. How strangely she took it all! Had she expected me to tell her that he was a married man? As for his identity with the murderer of old Myddelton, that hardly astonished her; she will believe it presently, though she is so set against it now. It was the last news which bore her down most, and yet somehow it struck me that she was not unprepared for it. I wonder how that could be. But my plan must work at last, and Honor shall be made to listen to me."

* * * * *

It was the night of Miss Craven's return to England, and the mansion in Kensington was lighted, and warmed, and carefully prepared for her, yet it was but a sad and solitary home-coming after all. In every room, and through every minute of that long evening, Honor missed the step, and voice, and smile of the old lady whom she had learned to love so well, and who had given to her so generous and so trusting an affection. True, every comfort and luxury awaited her, and servants came and went at her bidding. Yet it was a dreary home-coming after all, and the girl of nineteen, in her deep mourning, looked so small and solitary in the large

drawing-room when Mr. Stafford joined her after dinner (leaving the chaplain and the Indian secretary happy over the letters and papers which had awaited them), that he plunged into what he had intended only to say by-and-by.

"Miss Craven, what immense rooms these are! This one wants at least half a dozen forms about it, and half a dozen voices to break its stillness. And that reminds me"—it was quite as well to say that that reminded him as to say that her black-robed figure in its solitude had reminded him—"that it falls to me, now Mr. Haughton has left us, to propose that you engage a lady as companion, Miss Craven. May I undertake the preliminary steps for you?"

"Not quite yet," said Honor gently; "I will ask first if my cousin Phoebe will come and stay with me."

"You will write to her then, or shall I go down to Statton?"

"No, thank you"—Honor hesitated unaccountably over the reply—"I shall like to go down to Statton myself."

Mr. Stafford could not understand the tone.

"She is changed a good deal," he mused to himself, "since—I suppose since Lady Lawrence's death—and she *looks* changed too: not by her mourning, but by something else. Unless it was Haughton's visit, I cannot make it out. There is some purpose in her mind, some decidedly real and earnest purpose. What is it?"

"I trust," he added aloud, "you had no ill news from Statton in the letters you found here, Miss Craven?"

"No."

"That poor little French photographer is dead, I hear."

"Yes; and one of my other purposes for the journey to Statton is to bring his daughter back with me. There is abundance of room for her here, and I can take care of her, and perhaps lighten her suffering a little."

"One of my other purposes," repeated the lawyer to himself, watching her rather observantly. "To fetch her cousin if she will come, one purpose; to bring back the sick girl, another; and what is the third? The important one, evidently; I can see it in her face, poor child!"

The lawyer Lady Lawrence had chosen was a man of large, warm heart, and just sufficient self-esteem to know how valuable was his advice and help.

So he said, in his kind tones, "If you have any purpose in your visit to Kinbury in which my help can be of use to you, my dear Miss Craven, I hope you know your old friend John Stafford well enough to trust him."

She looked up into his face, in doubt only for a moment, then a great relief shone in her eyes.

"Will you help me?" she asked, almost below her breath.

"I will, my dear young lady; believe me in this—I will."

The promise was prompt and spontaneous, but it was none the less true for that; and she in a moment trusted it, and felt what a support and rest this help would be.

"I am going," she said, her hands clasped in her lap, and her lips trembling a little as the words passed them, "with this purpose—do not laugh or scorn; ah! please do not, for it is a purpose I cannot give up, though it will seem hopeless to you—I—want to find the real murderer of old Mr. Myddelton."

CHAPTER XXVI.

But, when I plead, she bids me play my part;

And, when I weep, she says tears are but water;

And, when I sigh, she says I know the art;

And, when I wail, she turns herself to laughter.

SPENSER.

Honor's unexpected appearance at The Larches, a few days after her return to England, had a very curious effect upon Miss Haughton. If an opportunity had been given that lady of declining to see her young cousin at all, she would gladly have availed herself of it; but Honor guessed something of this, and so sent no notice of her intention to visit Statton.

Mr. Stafford travelled with her to Kinbury, then she walked alone to East Cottage, and Marie Verrien—but for the mourning dress, and for something in Honor's face which gave it a new, sweet gravity—felt that Miss Craven might just have walked in from The Larches to chat with her as in old times.

And this was really the millionaire about whom the village had had so much to say, and of whose first visit here so many wild conjectures had been framed ! Marie gazed in wonder greater even than her admiration. They had told her Miss Craven had become one of the grandest ladies in England, that she had visited all the kings and queens in Europe, and that the greatest gentleman in the world was wooing her. Yet here she was, sitting quite naturally in the bare little kitchen, and talking just as she used to talk. And—ah ! was it a dream ? Surely it must be a dream !—she was proposing to take back, to her own beautiful, wonderful home, the lame, useless woman whom others thought a burden.

Was it any wonder that Marie, after that, could not utter one single connected speech through Honor's stay ? Honor herself made all arrangements for the removal. A neighbour who came in every morning and night to assist the lonely young Frenchwoman would help in this. The cottage could be given up at once to the old man who had the lodgings, and who, at her father's death, had expressed a wish to take the whole cottage. So Marie was to be ready to leave Statton on the next day but one.

After a bright hour for Marie, Honor continued her walk to The Larches. The distance seemed nothing to the girl, so busy were her thoughts, and so thickly memories crowded about her. Ten years of her life had been spent here in uninterrupted routine ; then had followed the two great events of her life. She had refused the only love she had ever prized or valued, and had won the vast wealth which made her life so different a one from that which they now lived who had formed her home in old days.

With her thoughts buried in those past times, she walked slowly on along the highway, and those who met, and knew her, stood to watch her out of sight, marvelling because, like the young Frenchwoman, they had built their own romances of Miss Craven's coming to Statton some day with half a dozen horses to her carriage, and men in scarlet riding beside it, passing under arches of flowers and evergreens, to the music of the volunteer band from Kinbury. And this was the way she had come at last !

All unconscious of the disappointment she was causing, Honor greeted these villagers with her bright words and

smiles, and seemed to forget just then that her home was not among them as it used to be.

Before she reached The Larches, she was overtaken by the Rector, who hurried cordially up to her.

"Mrs. Romer will be delighted;" he said, "you will come and see her, Miss Craven? You will come and stay with us a little?"

"I should like it very much, Mr. Romer," said Honor, with a readiness, and even gratitude, quite unexpected by him; "I only intend to be in this neighbourhood two days, and I am going now to The Larches—do you think they will ask me to stay?"

"Promise to come to us to-day, Miss Craven, do! Whatever they wish, let them know that you have given me the prior promise."

"Yes, I will promise, Mr. Romer. I see that you feel sure they will not care to see me, and I am very much obliged for your invitation."

And this was the return of the millionaire!

"Mr. Haughton has grown more morose than ever during the last few days, Honor,"—the old name slipped out so naturally when he found her just his little favourite of old days—"and Miss Haughton more wrapped up in her brother, or herself, or both. It will not cheer you to stay there, my dear."

"And Phoebe?"

"Phoebe is just what she always was, and probably what she always will be. You are sure to have heard all about the others," continued the Rector, looking down into her face, "as Captain Trent hurried to town to put himself at your service."

"Hervey's service," said Honor, laughing, "is pre-eminently a summer pastime, Mr. Romer. It is not a wearying process for him."

"I suppose Lady Lawrence discouraged his visits?"

"Yes, and he did not force them upon us."

"That was well, but it will be different now. Shall you go to Deergrove to-day?"

"Oh, no!"

"That is well, too. Mr. and Mrs. Trent are not generous to the memory of Lady Lawrence, or"—

"Or to me," smiled Honor.

"Of course you are going over to see Abbotsmoor. You will hardly know it."

"I hope not," she answered. "Mr. Stafford is staying in Kinbury, and will drive over for me to-morrow. I intend to spend a whole day at Abbotsmoor, as I want to go over the cottages as well as the house."

"The cottages, eh?" laughed the Rector. "There will not be much pleasure for you in that. The Abbotsmoor poor are a benighted set."

"Then it is high time, is it not, that some one lived at Abbotsmoor?"

"High time, indeed, and a good day it will be for Abbotsmoor, Honor, when you go."

They had reached The Larches now, and the Rector, with a last reminder to Honor of her promise, opened the gate for her.

She looked eagerly up at the bare windows of her old home, as she trod the familiar drive to the front door. No sign of any face looking out; and she knocked with a hand that trembled a little.

Yes, Miss Haughton *was* in, and Miss Owen—the housemaid was a new servant, and did not recognise Miss Craven.

Miss Haughton entered the room presently in her stiff black dress (it was a matter of pride more than courtesy in all old Myddelton's relations to assume mourning for Lady Lawrence), and held out her hand to Honor, as if offering the limb for voluntary sacrifice.

"I concluded it was you," she said, in dull, cold tones, which brought Honor's childhood back to her with a rush of self-pity, "though I wonder you have leisure or inclination to return here."

"I left London for the purpose of visiting Abbotsmoor," said Honor, honestly, "but I could not be so near, and not come to see you. Are you quite well, Jane?"

The girl soon found she had set herself no easy task in opening a genial discourse with Jane Haughton, and Phoebe's entrance after a time was a great relief.

"Why, Honor!" exclaimed Miss Owen, rushing up to kiss her cousin, "I had no idea it was you, else I should not have waited a minute."

"I shall leave you girls together now," observed Jane, rising. "Shall I send in a glass of wine, Honor, or are you going to stay here this evening?"

With a great effort Honor thanked her guardian's sister for this cordial invitation, and explained how her promise had been given to Mr. Romer; then Jane, with great unconcern, wished her good-bye and left the room.

"Phœbe," said Honor, standing with both her hands upon her cousin's shoulders, "will you come back with me?"

Looking down into the broad Dutch face, Honor saw a vivid scarlet spread from chin to brow.

"Oh, Honor!" she faltered and then stopped.

"Is it *no*?" asked Honor, sadly.

"I cannot come."

"Phœbe," said her younger cousin, presently, "just listen to me for a few moments. I can see from your manner that Lawrence and Jane would be angry—scornful, too, most probably—if you proposed coming to live with me; and now, as in old times, you would not for the world act against Lawrence's wish. And besides that," added the girl, gently, "I suppose it is still happiest for you where he is. But if the time ever comes when you think differently, Phœbe, remember what I tell you now. I shall be as glad to have you then as I should be glad to have you to-day. Be sure and remember this, dear little Frau; promise."

"Yes, Honor. It would be beautiful to live with you in such grandeur, and with no shortness of money, and scoldings, only"——

"Only you would rather wait," concluded Honor, kindly.

"But be sure and remember what I tell you, Phœbe."

"Oh, Honor!" sobbed Phœbe, with a new trouble, "Lawrence is harder than ever now."

Of course the very mention of his name unsealed the slightly-guarded fount of Phœbe's tears, and they flowed freely while she enlightened her old companion on the subject of her guardian's increasing indifference and general moodiness.

"Since his return from London, Honor, a week ago, he has been far, far worse."

"Never mind him," said Honor, in her honest contempt, as she recalled the reason of this. "Talk of some one else, little Frau."

A long hour, which Phœbe did not make a very cheerful one, the girls spent together; then they parted with a renewal of that promise of Phœbe's, and a request from Honor that when Mr. Stafford drove over from Kinbury next morning, Phœbe would send him on to the rectory.

A pleasant reception awaited Honor at the rectory, and, indeed, any little pleasure which she was to glean from the visit to Statton was to be due to the cheery Rector and his wife, except that generous pleasure it gave her to see the intense happiness of Marie Verrien in her preparations for departure.

The day she and Mr. Stafford spent at Abbotsmoor was a disappointing one. True, the house was growing comfortable and beautiful, but then the girl's real motive for the visit (that search among the cottages for Margaret Territ), was as much in vain as had seemed that search of Royden Keith's so long before.

"You must entirely give up your Quixotic idea, Miss Craven," remarked the lawyer, as they drove back to Statton. "Why, even if the woman could be found, she could not remove the guilt from Gabriel Myddelton. So do you not see it better to let the subject lie in its long oblivion?"

"No," said Honor, with a regretful shake of her head, "I do not see it better, Mr. Stafford, even now, when we have tried all day and met with no success."

"Well, I have given you my advice, my dear young lady; but still I need not remind you I am at your service even in this Quixotic search."

This was a gala evening at the rectory. Sir Philip and Lady Somerson had heard of Honor's advent, and driven over from the castle to spend this evening with her. And they all did their best to make this night a festival, just as if they understood how little Honor had been welcomed among her own connections.

Next day, with Mrs. Romer as her guest, she returned to London, and Marie Verrien was installed in a pretty little room, which seemed to her a perfect fairyland; containing, as it did, delightful devices for her comfort, pretty things for her to look upon, and materials for many a different and attractive work. What happy, placid hours Marie was to spend in this room!—sociable ones, also, to which the poor French girl had been but little accustomed. One or two at

a time the servants would come and sit and chat with her, bringing her something to see, or to discuss, or to laugh over.

Just as the servants in Royden Keith's household—following their master's example, as servants usually will—had been kind to, and considerate for, her father during that happy visit of his to Westleigh Towers, so were Honor's servants—following *her* example—thoughtful for this afflicted girl. But the brightest hours of all her life to Marie were those which Honor herself spent in the pleasant room, entering with her soft step and merry greeting, and sitting down, just as if the rest and the change were as good to her as to Marie. She would take the same interest as the sick girl did in a new pattern, or a picture, or a book; and sometimes she would sing to her, as dying ears had loved to hear her sing; while at others she would sit in silent interest, gently wooing Marie to talk of her father—ever the poor girl's one sweetest subject of thought or speech.

It was at these times that Marie often and gratefully mentioned the name of Royden Keith, and it was at these times that Honor's silence was so long and so unbroken.

Thus time sped on in the mansion at Kensington. Honor, though going into no society, was still sought after most persistently. Her mourning dress was no armour against the constant entreaties to join certain friends, "quietly," to visit just this old friend, who would ask "no one" to meet her; to allow that old friend to visit her, only bringing a son or brother, as the case might be, and "no one else." In her quiet, pleasant manner—a manner which never could give pain, whatever firmness it betrayed—Honor resisted these advances; and though she found it quite impossible to live as quietly as she wished, she certainly lived as quietly as she could. She had engaged a chaperon now, a stately widowed "Honourable," whose husband had held no moral claim to a like title, but who, in dying, left her all he had—his debts; after the payment of which she was glad and grateful to accept Honor's generous offer. But Honor still hoped that Phoebe would live with her; indeed, the feeling had grown to a perfect certainty.

There was one person belonging to Honor's old home who, through this winter, haunted her constantly, and this was Captain Trent.

Since her return as no longer heiress, but possessor, of old Myddelton's money, and Lady Lawrence's fortune, his attentions had been unmistakeable and increasing; and though she invariably treated them as a jest when she was forced to notice them at all, that fact had no power to weaken or diminish them. Sometimes, even in reality, they amused Honor, for they were too selfish and too shallow to cause her a shade of pain; and her bright laugh would break the silence of the great house in the very midst of his most elaborate speeches and most carefully selected pleas. His sighs and pathos she turned into fun; his devotion altogether was a merry jest, too trivial and too hollow to be aught else. Nevertheless, as far as Captain Hervey understood the sensation, he felt himself to be thoroughly in love, and he played his part in that capacity to the best of his somewhat limited power. But still he could not make the part a manly one, nor prevent the ludicrous element being that which always struck Honor first and irresistibly.

Yet how was it, as Captain Hervey constantly questioned to himself, that his wooing would not speed? Other girls valued his languid attentions, and met them so readily that he had none of this sense of fatigue and defeat which he constantly experienced with Honor. Other girls took the wit on credit when they listened graciously to the words which issued so correctly from under the silky moustache; other girls laughed when he wished them to laugh, and questioned in great interest when he waited for them to question; but Honor did really necessitate his exerting himself in a most unusual and uncharacteristic manner.

"And yet for all your disregard, I am sure I shall never love anyone else as I love you, Honor," he would urge, "and as I have always loved you."

"Since you were rich,—why do you not finish your sentence, Hervey?"

"It is too bad of you always to say that, Honor," he would urge, "for it is not true. Indeed, I used to love you just the same when I was"—

"Telling you about my probable marriage with Theodora.' See, I have to finish all your sentences for you. Oh, when you used to lecture me on my *gaucherie*, you were most seriously in love with me, Hervey—were you not?"

"Yes," answered Hervey, the more fretfully because he knew how truly the girl had read him even then. "And you could have no husband—choose where you might—who would be more devoted to you, Honor ; and we are connections, you know, and we have known each other all our lives ; and I am not a bad-looking fellow, as other women say ; and I should make you a good husband indeed."

"For a hot and idle summer mood," would Honor say, when forced to answer this weak proposal ; "but for sad moods and heavy moods, and, above all, for earnest moods and solemn moods, you would not make me a good husband at all, Hervey."

"But try me in earnest, Honor ; do not take it always as a joke."

"It *is* a joke," the girl would say, in gravity ; "and, if I ever cease to take it as a joke, we could not be old friends, because, however earnestly I beg, you will not leave off these silly speeches."

No—Hervey was not to be rebuffed. As time went on he only made himself more and more ridiculous in his unmanly persistence ; and, but for Honor's intense kindness to him as to one—and the only one near her—belonging to her old life, she would many times have been tempted to forbid him her house.

But the strongest reason for not doing this was a mixture of pity with her kindness, for there had stolen into her mind a fear that his pursuits in town were not merely useless ones, such as they used to be when in graceful indolence he awaited landed estates and a million of money. Now Captain Hervey's magnificent expectations had dissolved in air. He had all his time upon his hands ; and the seven hundred a year, which had been a satisfactory income to trade upon before the arrival of Myddelton's wealth, was a poor fortune for a man of idle habits and expensive tastes. Those acquaintances who, during the years of his great expectations, had gathered round Captain Trent preparatory to supporting and guiding the millionaire, had, after their brief relapse, gathered about him now, to encourage him for his next move ; and—making him dissolute and extravagant like themselves, though they could not make him either so crafty or so keen—they spurred him on in his pursuit of Honor.

If he could win her and all her wealth, he would be one of the most important men in England. and certainly the lion of society—they had not studied Hervey's nature for their own purposes, without knowing its weak points—and how he could laugh at the defeat of richer and nobler men, if he could win the beauty for whom everybody strove.

Thus they spurred him on, and his weak, selfish plans fitted so admirably with theirs, that he learned his lesson easily and well. And whilst this great move was pending, other tasks were learned, into which he readily fell, seeing them only as other forms of worship for his old idol of "Good Form."

And in this worship, Hervey was slowly sinking to the level of an habitual gambler, when another London season began, and Honor, obeying an urgently expressed wish of Lady Lawrence's, opened the Kensington mansion, and once again entered into society, to be more sought after and flattered even than before, though so much more grave and quiet, and wearing still no colours.

Everyone noticed the undefinable change in her, the deepening of that thoughtfulness which had ever lain below her dainty merriment; but everyone noticed, too, how there still clung to her the old power, which she had ever possessed in an intense degree, of both giving and enjoying happiness.

One morning, early in the season, Honor sat poring over a very unusual and rambling letter from Phœbe. It seemed both to pain and please her, for, though the tears were standing in her eyes, she folded the letter with a smile when she had read it.

"It is pitiful," she murmured, "and yet I am *very* glad."

Then her thoughts wandered to others belonging to her old home, and at last fixed themselves sadly upon Hervey.

Gradually, all through the winter, he had been growing more and more idle, listless, and extravagant. Gradually he seemed to be losing his self-respect; and, in the intervals of his suit, he would entreat her to interest herself for a "capital fellow" he knew, who said she could, by a word, get him a certain appointment for which he had a talent and a wish; because the men in office would be glad enough to have the opportunity of obliging her, and proud

to do it too. Then when—very firmly, though always kindly—she would refuse all help that was not for himself alone, he, rehearsing his lesson, would borrow for himself some sum, “just only for a few days, Honor.” At another time he would tease her to allow him to introduce these friends of his, until she would turn upon him with her old spirit, and tell him that their influence over him was quite enough to prove their worthlessness. But Hervey, impervious to hints, wearied her day after day with the old story; and still, in her good-natured scorn, she met it as a jest, because she wished to save him from what he might be tempted to seek.

She was thus thinking of him, with Phoebe's letter still in her hand, when he came into her presence in a state as nearly bordering on excitement as he could reach. Honor glanced up and smiled. He had not been near her for two days, and she fancied that he was at last trying to please her. But his first words dispelled this fancy.

“I have been away for two days, Honor,” he said “and I declare it seems a year. They sent for me to Deergrove to arrange about my taking a house for them. They are coming for a couple of months. It is a great bore; but that is not what I came to say. I find an invitation from Lady Somerson for to-night, and I want to know if you are going, Honor?”

“Yes; she is my oldest friend, you know.”

“I thought you would. How many dances will you promise me?”

“One, as usual.”

“Then I cannot go. It is hateful to be laughed at for getting nipped whenever I ask you.”

“Then why do you ask me?”

“Because I cannot help it when I am near you. But I suppose I can if I stay away, so I will go with the other fellows.”

“Where?” asked Honor, gravely.

“To—oh, you would not understand.”

“I do understand,” she said, and her voice was full of sadness. “I have seen this habit growing upon you, Hervey. I have seen it from the very first, and I tell you plainly now, as I have tried to make you understand before, that you must either give up that habit of play, or you must give up coming here.”

"I cannot help it," said Hervey, moodily ; "I am so miserable always now. You will not listen to me, and people always taunt me for following you everywhere, to no purpose ; and you only laugh at me ; and what can I do but amuse myself some other way ?"

"Very well," said Honor, with a quiet scorn in her grave voice. "Go; only, in the leisure hours between your games, do not come here."

"I never go further than a gentleman should, Honor," said Captain Trent, feebly grasping at her good opinion with what had always been his strong argument. "You do not care to see me, you know you do not," he added, plaintively ; "else I would do anything to win your good opinion."

"To win that," said Honor, quietly "you must leave off these—I will not say, as you do, *ungentlemanly*, but most *unmanly*—pursuits."

"And if I do ?"

"If you do, we are friends still, and you shall come as you have been used to do."

"But Theodora will be in town presently," said Hervey, with a sigh of recollection ; "and I am always so terribly bored when I am not with you ; besides"——

"Besides what ?" asked Honor, looking up with sudden fear. "Will you let the old habit hold you still ?"

"Not if I can help it," he said, uneasily ; "but sometimes it is even necessary. I have more debts than I imagined, and paying them off makes a sad hole in my paltry income. I have so much time on my hands too ; and—Theo will be so dull."

"Hervey," she said, "would you like an employment for some of these wasted hours, employment (as you would say) suited for a gentleman ? If you would, and if you are really steady and anxious in the wish, I will buy for you that bank partnership Mr. Stafford told us of when you were here last. Take these months, while Theodora is in town, for making your choice ; do not hurriedly do it. I will not bias you in any way. If, when the time is over, you have not left the old ways, or have decided you would rather have your time to yourself, then we will forget this plan. If you have decided that twenty-four hours in every day is too much time to waste ; and that easy, light occupation for five of those, would make the others pleasanter, and prevent your

life being such a listless, drifting career ; and if you feel that the extra income which you need, would be more honestly enjoyed by being *earned* than by being robbed from others—why, then the partnership shall be yours. You cannot complain of your income then, Hervey."

"Oh! Honor," he cried, astonished; "how good you are!"

"No," she said, shrinking a little from his excitement, "I know that you used to—to depend upon inheriting what fell so strangely to my lot; and I should like to do a little towards making this up to you; only I want none of this money which I hold in trust to be wasted, or, above all, used for evil purposes. So you understand, Hervey, why I wish you to take this time to think it earnestly over. I would not like you to take this post, and then regret it; and I would not like you to refuse it now, and afterwards feel it beyond your reach if better thoughts should follow. So remember you have the time of Theodora's stay to make your choice. I shall not see you then so much—do not interrupt me, please—but if you continue this horrible gambling, as I said, I will not see you at all. If you do not, Hervey, we are old friends still; and this is a home for you in leisure hours. At the end of the two months bring me your choice, and it shall be all right at the bank."

"Oh, Honor, how good you are to me!" he cried again; "and may I come with you to-night?"

"Yes. Now tell me something of Kinbury and Statton, Hervey; then I will give you my news. Did you go to Abbotsmoor?"

"Certainly. It is getting on magnificently. It will be a beautiful place, or rather it is. But, Honor, what wonderful improvements there are, independent of the house! I never saw such comfortable cottages in my life, and then those almshouses for the Kinbury poor, and that one long pretty building far away in the park. I really believe Romer made a fool of me when he told me what that is. He said that you would have it full of starved or hard worked London people; that when you saw those who looked as if they never awoke to any day without its work and want, you would send them there. He said there would be a housekeeper and servants, and flowers, and games, and everything for every season, and I did not believe it, Honor"

"You ought always to believe your clergyman," smiled Honor, while the colour faded which had risen at his words.

"Now, what is your news, Honor?"

"You have soon finished. Never mind; I shall hear more to-day, for—and this is my news, Hervey—Phœbe is coming to live with me for always."

"For always!" echoed Captain Trent, with a pleading glance which Honor did not even see. "What on earth can induce her voluntarily to leave Lawrence Haughton's home? She will come to the ball, I suppose," he added, his conversation unconnected as usual. "Oh, Honor, do give me more than one dance."

"I do not think," she said quietly, "that I shall dance at all, except that one dance with you. If I do, it will only be because—because some old friend may chance to be there and to ask me. Come in and dine with us at eight, Phœbe will be glad to see you. She arrives early in the afternoon. Now, good-bye, for I am going to get a dress for her."

"May I not come?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what am I to do, for I said if I came back I would go—"

"What a weak and helpless promise," said Honor, sadly. "Then come with me. Go and tell Marie the latest news of home, while you are waiting for me."

So, for this time, she had rescued him from temptation. Not by love, for her heart, with all its warmth of kindness, could hold no love for this vain, weak cousin, but with the generosity which was natural to her, the wide pity for all weakness, and the longing to reclaim from sin.

CHAPTER XXVII.

**Mothers all proffer their stainless daughters;
Men of high honour salute him "friend."**

BARRY CORNWALL.

LATE in the afternoon of that same day, Royden Keith arrived at his hotel in Jermyn Street. He had been at

Westleigh Towers for a few days, but had, according to a promise to Sir Philip and Lady Somerson, returned in time for their first ball. After dinner, as he sat over his wine, he opened the letters which had collected for him. They were nearly all alike in their messages, however differently worded, and Royden laid them aside, one after another.

"These gracious invitations," he said to himself, "and the gentle intimations that so many people are *at home* to me, are all directed to Royden Keith, of Westleigh Towers. How many of them did I receive twelve years ago?"

He pushed the letters and the enamelled cards carelessly aside; then, leaning his head upon his hand, he fell into thought, so vague and visionary, that presently his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

Five minutes afterwards Pierce entered, with his noiseless step, and looked upon his master curiously.

"Odd," the valet mused to himself; "he has been over-worked or over-harassed at The Towers. One, if not both, for it isn't like him to sleep—even after dinner. But it is just as well he should; he has had a good deal of travelling to-day, and will be up all night. But then what shall I do about Mr. Haughton? I can keep him a few minutes, at any rate."

Pierce went out to Mr. Haughton's cab, and told that gentleman that his master would be at liberty in ten minutes' time; and having said that, he knew he must, at the end of the ten minutes, admit the visitor into his master's presence on his own responsibility.

Just as Mr. Haughton dismissed his cab, Captain Trent strolled up and accosted him. As usual, Captain Hervey was in no hurry, and so Lawrence, for reasons of his own, selected to spend these waiting minutes strolling to and fro with him.

"I had no idea you were in town," Hervey said, after his rather astonished greeting. "Have you been to Kensington?"

"No," returned Lawrence, very stiffly, "nor do I know that I shall go. I have come to town on business—a word you do not understand."

"What business?" inquired Hervey, languidly.

Lawrence smiled with scornful insolence. The notion of

enlightening Captain Hervey Trent on his business affairs amused him somewhat.

"Are you not engaged?" he asked, perhaps for a reason of his own, perhaps only superciliously turning aside the other subject.

"Not until night," rejoined Captain Trent, with conscious pride. "I am going to escort Honor to Sir Philip Somerson's."

"Who is likely to be there?"

"Oh, everybody, I suppose."

"I remember," said Lawrence, with a well-assumed indifference, "that fellow, Keith, who came to Kinbury for the shooting, two Septembers ago, was very great at the castle: He will be there to-night, I suppose?"

"Sure to be, if he is in London," said Hervey, really indifferent at present upon the subject. "He is always asked everywhere, so they say."

"I daresay in London, as in Kinbury, what *they say* is generally a lie."

Captain Trent looked astonished into his cousin's face. He could not understand the moody and vindictive tones, though he did not associate them with what he himself had said, either of Honor or Mr. Keith. Therefore, in his usually complacent drawl, he enlarged upon what he had already said, and gave Mr. Haughton a graphic description of the spirit in which Royden Keith was received into society; not only as far as he himself had been able to observe it, but also as far as—or perhaps a little farther than—he had heard from other men.

"I suppose," concluded Hervey, unobservant of the effect of his words, "there is no fellow who is considered so good a *parti* this season. There are wealthier, I know, and men of higher birth, of course; but, taken all together, there is no one who can rival Keith with match-making mothers or marriageable daughters. He is attractive, they say, in a hundred ways, besides being wealthy and of good position. He is undeniably handsome—for those who like that style," concluded Captain Hervey, softly pulling his fair moustache; "and he is clever, I suppose—people say so, at any rate—and he seems up to all manly exercises, and has travelled a great deal. Whatever it is," acceded Hervey, with graceful

dismissal of the subject, "he is certainly as much thought of and sought after, only of course in a different way, as Honor is ; and really, if I were not a privileged person in that quarter, Lawrence, I should never get near Honor, so much in request is she always."

Lawrence smiled a little grimly ; he was not a man to be taken in by Hervey's arrogant conceit, and knew Honor far too well to heed the insinuation ; but the very knowledge which prevented any fear of Captain Trent, made him feel all the more what Hervey had told him of Royden, and made his jealousy more keen and bitter in that comparison between Honor and Mr. Keith.

"There's another matter which adds to Keith's popularity here," said Hervey, though Lawrence had turned sharply round, as if the conversation had become tedious ; "that is, the current report of the good he does on his estate at Westleigh. I dare say the rumours are as much exaggerated as other rumours—but they go down. Here you stop, do you ?"

Yes, Mr. Haughton decidedly stopped here. He had enjoyed Captain Trent's society quite long enough, and even Captain Trent himself would have been roused to a little anxiety if he had been able to perceive the harmful effect of his words as a preparation for the visit Lawrence Haughton intended to pay.

When Pierce entered his master's presence to announce Mr. Haughton, Royden was wide awake again, and had already answered one or two of those letters which had contained something more important than invitations. He glanced up in surprise to see that Mr. Haughton personally followed his card ; then he slowly rose, with a grave, cold bow, and waited for Mr. Haughton to speak.

"Doubtless you are surprised to see me, Mr. Keith ?"

"Very rarely," said Royden, with his quiet courtesy, "does anything surprise me, Mr. Haughton."

"When I saw you last, or, rather, when I last called upon you," resumed Lawrence, plunging at once into the subject, as if he saw how unnecessary any introduction would be, "I made some inquiries, if you recollect, about your possible cognisance of the hiding-place of Gabriel Myddelton."

"I recollect it well."

Mr. Keith had resumed his chair; but the lawyer had pushed his aside, as if he saw an advantage in standing sternly on the rug.

"Since then," he resumed, in his harsh, elaborate tones, "I have myself obtained a clue to the present whereabouts of—old Mr. Myddelton's murderer."

A slight change in the handsome dark face opposite—a change to surprise, and even to fear, but so slight that Lawrence, a moment afterwards, could not feel sure that he had seen it.

"You merit my congratulations," remarked Royden, coolly, "in having at last achieved your object. Of course you know your clue to be worth following, or you would not waste your valuable time."

The lawyer was gazing with unfeigned astonishment into Royden's face. In all his professional experience no man had ever puzzled him as this man did.

"I would first ask you," he said, less for the purpose of gaining time than in his desire to feel his way cautiously to a certain point in the conversation, "whether you have not *yourself* sufficient knowledge on this subject. If so, my information may prove wearisome."

"No information on this subject," observed Royden, frankly meeting the lawyer's supercilious gaze, "can be wearisome to me, Mr. Haughton."

"Then I will tell you what I have heard." Lawrence had seated himself at last, but he sat firm and upright, determined to exhibit in every way the inflexibility of his nature, and his gaze was so fixed that no change upon his listener's face could escape him now. "I have heard that Gabriel Myddelton is, and has been for some time, in England."

No answer.

"In England," repeated Lawrence, forcibly.

"Rash," remarked Mr. Keith, with easy unconcern. "Yet, ever since Gabriel Myddelton's story was related to me, I have given him credit for a caution which amounted to timidity."

"And not only do I believe him to be in England," continued Lawrence, hardly able to suppress his wrath, "but I believe him to be here—in London."

"Naturally," remarked Royden, with the utmost composure. "It is considered easy to escape detection in a crowd."

"He is not in London for that purpose," returned Lawrence, with keen emphasis, "for before coming here he stayed for a time close to the very scene of the murder."

"Still more rash!"

"In a very uncrowded country town," concluded Mr. Haughton, with greater emphasis.

"Kinbury?" inquired his listener. And at this moment there broke upon his lips one of his rare smiles—a smile which certainly Lawrence Haughton could not understand.

"Yes, in Kinbury," repeated the lawyer. "Gabriel Myddelton was, I hear, staying during the latter months of the year '71 at the Royal Hotel, in Kinbury."

"Strange," mused Royden, slowly raising his clear and thoughtful eyes, "for I was myself staying at the Royal Hotel, in Kinbury, during that very time."

An inexplicable and ominous pause. Mr. Haughton's gaze intent and watchful; Mr. Keith's questioning and a little quizzical. The whole suspicion of the man before him was read now, as well as the jealous, passionate purpose which stirred him more than the suspicion. Yet Lawrence could read nothing beyond the one humiliating fact, that his own motives and designs were comprehended fully and entirely. But surely the fact he had just affirmed must stir this man to the very soul. Could he attempt to keep up any deception after this?

Waiting to see, Lawrence maintained a marked silence. The pause would betray as much as any speech, and he would rather his companion's words should break it. But Royden had evidently no intention of breaking it.

"Yes," remarked Lawrence, having waited as long as he could afford to wait in vain, "you were staying at the Royal Hotel in Kinbury at that time. Is it odd that, knowing this, and being unaware of any other stranger sojourning there, too, I should connect in my mind the man of whose presence I there heard, with the man whose presence there I saw?"

"I hardly follow you: Be distinct, if you please, in consideration for my ignorance on this topic. With whose presence did you connect mine?"

"With that of Gabriel Myddelton."

The words, especially the last two, were uttered with unusual distinctness. Lawrence, though conscious of reserving in his own hands the final move for checkmate, did not enjoy these constant preliminary checks which his companion dealt him in so leisurely a manner.

"Gabriel Myddelton?"—Royden repeated the name lazily, stooping his head the while to pick up a letter which had fallen to the carpet—"Was he staying in Kinbury during a part of September, October, and November, of 1871?"

"He was, so I am assured."

"Were you aware of it at the time?"

"I felt confident of it even then," returned Mr. Haughton, imitating his companion's manner, now that he felt it was his turn to cry check; "but my proofs then were not so strong and conclusive as they are now."

"May I inquire if they are quite strong and conclusive now?"

Mr. Haughton's face darkened perceptibly. This question touched his one weak point; the attempt to strengthen which point had employed him, and held back this information, for nine months.

"May I ask you," repeated Royden, composedly, "if your evidence now is quite strong and conclusive?"

Lawrence no longer hesitated over the answer which was his move for checkmate.

"Yes."

"Then I wish you had told me at the time. I should very much have liked to see him."

Lawrence rose to his feet in an outburst of wrath, which, though he did not know it, was leavened heavily with fear of defeat.

"What does this mean, this parrying of words?" he asked, in his stern, harsh tones. "You make me speak out, while the hint would have been sufficient for any other man. From your own deductions, if you cannot catch mine, Gabriel Myddelton was staying at the hotel in Kinbury while you were there; yet one fact is gleaned from the hotel books—only *one* stranger put up there for that unusually lengthy time. Then you and Gabriel Myddelton are one."

He had said it at last. The suspicion of nearly a year's growth had found language now, and neither the pallor nor flush of conscious guilt had, in that moment, found its way to Royden's handsome face.

"And you have your proof now?" he questioned, as he rose and laid his fingers on the handle of the bell.

"I have my proof," retorted Lawrence, staunchly, as he stood upon the rug trying to shake off his uneasiness both of face and attitude.

"That's good," observed Royden, with the glimpse of South America which sometimes peeped out in tone and accent; and as he spoke he pulled aside the bell-handle.

"When you make an assertion it is good to be able to prove it. I conclude from your last remark, Mr. Haughton, that it was from you I received, some time ago, an anonymous letter threatening me with the law if I did not leave this country. Yes, I rang"—he had turned to the servant then, and his tones were not more easy and unconcerned than they had been before—"Call a cab for Mr. Haughton."

"The answer to that cowardly and unsigned letter," he resumed, when Pierce had closed the door again, "I will give you now. I do not choose to leave any country at your bidding. You offered, I believe, in that letter—I had not the patience to read it through, but I understood so much—to keep this onerous secret of my identity with the murderer of old Mr. Myddelton of Abbotsmoor, if I would leave England at once. But you threatened, if I would not do so, to betray my real name to other members of your family; especially—if I understood aright this was a very emphatic *especially*—Miss Honor Craven. I do not ask you for your motive, because it has been clear to me from the first, but I give you my answer once for all. I shall not in any way, either by my absence or promise, tamper to your own base ends and purposes. As for that one fact of my identity with Gabriel Myddelton, bring your proof when you are bold enough to repeat the assertion."

"I will," cried Lawrence, in a voice of suppressed rage; "and remember that after I have left your presence to-day, it will be too late for you to avail yourself of the immunity I have offered you. I shall go from here at once to Miss Craven—I say to her first." amended Mr. Haughton, the

colour rising in his moody face, as he brought forward this untrue excuse, "as being now the most influential member of the family; and I shall lay the whole deception before her. From there I shall go——"

"Your destination is a matter of no moment at all to me, sir. And your cab is waiting."

"Then you refuse this compromise?" blurted out Lawrence.

Deficient in proof as he felt himself to be, he knew that a mutual agreement would be a much safer and speedier arrangement for him than the arduous following up of this intangible clue.

"I refuse all idea of compromise with you, Mr. Haughton. I do not even understand the term as applicable between us. You are at liberty, so far as I am concerned, to go where you choose and to say what you choose. You have, for months, been paving the way for this disclosure; pray finish the work you have in hand. Need I remind you once again that your cab is waiting?"

"You understand, then," observed the lawyer, with a hard, long gaze into his companion's face, "that your real name and character are known to me, and, before this day is over, shall be known to others. After I have left you, it will be too late for you to attempt further dissimulation."

"If you utter one word more of this kind to me, sir," interrupted Royden, raising himself from his leaning posture against the chimney, and facing Lawrence Haughton with his long dark eyes aflame, "you shall answer it in a way you little anticipate. Possibly your confidential clerk and ally has informed you how *he* was punished for dogging my footsteps practically as you have dogged them theoretically. Let his example be a warning to you, for there is but one way of dealing with dastardly insinuations."

"I shall consider now," exclaimed Mr. Haughton, his clenched fist shaking in his wrath, and his lips compressed and hard, "that you have brought upon yourself all that follows. I would, if you had accepted my very simple conditions, have guarded your secret. If you had left England—and no one knows better than yourself how dangerous for you is every hour's sojourn here—I would have buried the truth as safely as you yourself could do."

"A lawyer, I believe," observed Royden, carelessly, "understands the meaning of such a term as misprision of felony."

"But—but," cried Lawrence, waxing hotter and hotter, in his rage at the insinuation, and because there dawned no sign of acquiescence in the proud, still face opposite him, "if you choose to persist in passing yourself off as a man of unblemished character, and"—

"Be silent, sir," interrupted Royden; "my character is not in *your* hands to clear or blacken. I will thank you to understand that our interview is at an end. I have no word further to say to you, unless I express the hope that in your further search for old Mr. Myddelton's murderer you may be able to secure a more able auxiliary than your cowardly little clerk, and"—Royden's eyes under their heavy lashes were bright, for a moment, with quizzical amusement—"and a victim more easily cowed, and duped and driven, than myself. Good evening."

With the last words he turned and sauntered to the window, opening the door as he passed it. The lawyer could not fail to understand the scornful hint, and he walked towards the door, his heavy step heavier than usual.

"Good evening," he said, answering with a scorn equal to Royden's, though savage instead of cool. "All which follows this interview, you have brought upon yourself."

No answer from the figure standing at the window, and Mr. Haughton left the room in a passion which, though suppressed, boded a thorough willingness to inflict all the suffering which lay in his power to give.

The soft dusk of the May night filled the room where Royden sat; the letters were still unwritten, and the invitations still lay unheeded. Pierce had twice been in to rouse his master from his reverie, but Pierce's master was not to be roused. And, if Lawrence Haughton could just then have re-entered the handsome room, his feelings of mortification need not have weighed so heavily upon that exhilarating consciousness of approaching revenge.

"Nine o'clock, sir. Will you not dress?"

The valet had lighted up the rooms now, and knew it was high time to disturb his master in earnest.

Royden changed his seat, and drew a sheet of paper before him.

"Not yet, Pierce," he said. "I will ring in an hour's time. If I ring twice, I shall want one of the grooms to dispatch a telegram for me. I have not decided yet whether I will go myself."

"But you promised to go, sir, and returned on purpose."
"Where?"

Pierce explained sedately. It had never struck him that his master could have meditated any journey beyond the drive to Sir Philip Somerson's London house.

Royden looked absently up from his writing while the explanation was given. Then he said he had not decided. With this unusually curt reply, the valet had to be content; but so unused was he to any changeable conduct in his master, that his surmises were many.

"He returned on purpose for this ball," so the valet's musings ended; "and I don't see what need have changed his decision. I wish I hadn't promised Mr. Haughton admission until I knew it was the master's wish to see him. I always dread those telegrams for Westleigh, because I believe he'd bear anything rather than harass her. I don't like that quiet, haughty look of his to-night; it means suffering for the master."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

We have received your letters full of love . . .
And in our maiden council rated them . . .
As bombast.

Love's Labour Lost

HONOR was holding a kind of festival at the Kensington mansion, on the arrival of Phoebe Owen. When it was possible, Honor always did make her welcome quite a festival; and many an extra grain of pleasure and of happiness could she thus infuse into the visits which were paid her. The freshness and earnest cordiality of the girl's nature showed themselves in a strong light this evening, while she devoted herself with an almost comical excitement to make this arrival a matter of rejoicing.

And even Phoebe, through all her wondering admiration of Honor's grandeur, and in the midst of her own self-con-

centrated anticipations, could still notice how the old quaint brightness clung to Honor still, and wondered, almost to an earnest purpose, why Honor should make a fuss over the coming of her poor cousin, when there were so many servants in the house.

"Aren't we snug, Phœbe?"

The question came from Honor, as they sat at tea together in one of her own private sitting-rooms—a bright and luxurious apartment, glistening with satin and silver, and looking like a fairy palace to Phœbe.

"Yes, very snug," she said; but the tone was almost dubious in her wonder. Could it really be Honor, looking so lovely, and moving about so thoroughly at home in this beautiful house? And could it really be herself who was entertained here so grandly, and yet made to feel as if she had reached her own home?

"I hadn't any messages to bring you, Honor," she remarked, presently, with her characteristic want of tact; "neither Jane nor Lawrence sent any, and I saw no one else who knew I was coming."

"Were Lawrence and Jane at home when you left?"

"No; Lawrence went away yesterday. He had said, from the first, that I was welcome to go where I chose. But Jane was at home when I started, and she barely touched my hand. Oh, Honor!"——

And for the second time since her arrival Phœbe burst into excited tears.

Quietly and soothingly Honor led the conversation away from their old home, guessing how sore Phœbe's heart would be at any reminder of her guardian's neglect. She never for one moment suspected that Phœbe had come to her with any hope of being nearer Lawrence than she had been in the chill and distant reserve of his own house; she only understood, what Phœbe herself told her, that the old home life had grown unbearable, and that her cousin had come to her for a refuge, both from Lawrence Haughton's morose neglect and his sister's hard displeasure.

"As for Hervey," said Phœbe, a smile struggling through her tears, as Honor led her to talk of the family at Deergrove, "we don't see much of him. He is always with you, isn't he, Honor?"

"If so, he will be with you too," smiled Honor; "so you will see. At any rate, he is going with us to-night to Lady Somerson's."

"Oh, I cannot," gasped Phœbe, the old affliction strong upon her; "I have no dress."

"Wait and see," said Honor, with a kiss; "there are some garments in your dressing-room, little Frau, which we are going to investigate presently; and if you don't look——"

She had paused to take a card from the salver which a footman, entering softly, handed to her. Her eyes had fallen carelessly enough upon the name, but then they had darkened, and as she took up the card her fingers covered it.

"I will come to the library," she said, dismissing the man with a glance. "I must go downstairs for a few minutes, Phœbe," she added, rising and holding the card still hidden in her hand. "Take care of yourself until I come back in a few minutes' time."

Phœbe nodded from her large arm-chair, still full of wonder at the quiet, gracious bearing which seemed natural to Honor now, while she was still just the bright and girlish Honor of old days.

"If I had changed my dress I could have come too," she remarked, plaintively.

"It would be too bad if, in the very hour of your arrival, you began helping me to receive my visitors; you will have abundance of such tasks presently. But see," Honor continued, as the door opened again, "you are to have the task of entertaining, after all. Hervey, I am glad to see you though you are very early. I said 'Dinner at eight.'"

"I know," said Hervey, deprecatingly; "but you told me I might come early, and of course you knew I should."

"I am very glad you came. Phœbe will give you some tea while I run away for a minute."

"A lady has called to see her, I think," explained Phœbe, as she took her place at the tea-table, with a new shyness which gave her a new gentleness too.

"No lady," rejoined Captain Hervey, moodily. "It is Haughton, who is waiting for her below."

Phœbe raised her wide, round eyes in alarm, and forgot Captain Trent's tea—a matter to which he was utterly indifferent.

"Oh, Hervey," she stammered at last, "he has come for me!"

"Not he," said Hervey, quite indifferently, though with out his old lazy scorn of her speeches.

"Oh, what shall I do? I—I must see him; and yet, if he takes me back to Jane! Oh, Honor will be so vexed if he is come for me!"

"Less vexed, I should fancy," rejoined Hervey, anxiously turning his eyes to the door, "than if he had come for another purpose. Don't fret, Phœbe," he cried, with kindness; "there is no fear of Lawrence taking you back to Jane."

She had collected herself then, and made an effort to do ~~the~~ her honours gracefully. Hervey Trent, standing upon the rug, and longing for the return of Honor, had yet time to notice that Phœbe was not so heavy as she used to be, and that perhaps, if she dressed like Honor, and did not fall back on her old ecstatic tricks, but could, by some marvellous means, acquire a composed demeanour, he should not object to take her under his wing, just occasionally, when Honor particularly wished it.

"Of course it gives a man *prestige* to take Honor," he mused; "and, if Phœbe improves, she won't do much harm."

Wondering how far such improvement might be possible, he condescended to exert himself a little during their *tête-à-tête*; and Phœbe, too much astonished at any attentions from her languid cousin to exert herself at all, pleased him more than she could ever have done with her exclamatory style of converse. So they were friendly and easy, as Honor had hoped they would be, almost before she had closed the library door behind her, and stood in the presence of her old guardian, fresh from that mortifying visit of his to Royden Keith.

Lawrence stood looking from the window in the handsome library, just as he had stood in his fear of looking at Honor when she came, in her beauty and her freshness, to the wearied, mortified watchers for Lady Lawrence; and just as he feared to let the old weakness master him then, he feared to let it master him now, but with a still more dangerous and guilty purpose.

Some faint fear of his purpose she gleamed from his face

when he turned to greet her, and for a moment she wished she had not answered the request upon his card to see him alone. Only for a moment; then her courage came back to her, and she waited quietly for what he had to say.

"Honor," he began, making an effort to put aside one certain thought, and ask with ease a question whose answer might make that thought unnecessary—"Honor, all my letters to you have been so long unheeded that I am come myself now for their answer."

"There is no answer," said Honor, quietly.

"No answer?" He repeated the words sharply, while he moved towards her with a quick, impatient step. "What do you mean, Honor?"

"I mean simply what I say," she answered, raising her clear eyes to his face. "They all told the same old story; and from the first, as you know full well, that story wearied me beyond words."

"You were a petulant child then, Honor," he said, curbing his voice with a strong effort; "you are a woman now, and can appreciate such devotion as I offer—a man's strong and deeply-rooted love, not a boy's wayward affection."

No answer in his pause, and he came still nearer to her on the hearth, his chest heaving, his fingers clenched as his hands hung beside him.

"Honor, you will recall this day with pity for yourself, if you send me from you with such answer as you try to utter now. I am not one to lightly give and take my love. It must be successful, after these years of waiting, or I cannot calmly stand aside and see my love give her hand to another—as I have known idiots do. Why should I alone be miserable, when the misery is your fault? I have given you too much to be patient at no return. I have not loved you for your wealth—you know that; and you know it of no one else. I loved you years ago. I gave you all the love I had, when you were poor and almost friendless. Who else has done so? Those men who fawn upon you now care nothing for yourself;—it is your wealth they court"—

"Lawrence," she said, stopping him with an appealing gesture, and a look of real pain upon her face, "please do not talk of this. I must make once more my old request. You were my guardian, and so I have borne from you what

I would have borne from no one else. But you must not speak to me so again, or our friendship must be broken for ever."

Keenly watching her as she spoke, he read aright—so well he knew the face he loved—the hopelessness of his ambition. And then the cruelty of his despair and jealousy rose up and took his words in its sole charge.

"If you had listened to me, and answered me differently," he cried, "I would have spared you all I could. I would have spared you every knowledge, and even thought, of crime and deception. As it is, you shall know what I know;—then you will see, perhaps, whose love is worth accepting, and then—Ah, Honor," he cried, once more weak in his passion, "it is not too late yet—I have not spoken. I never need speak, if you will only promise at last to repay my years of devotion."

"What have you to tell me of crime and deception?"

She spoke firmly, but her hand had seized the back of a chair beside her, and her eyes had gathered a terrible fear under their drawn brows.

"What I will tell you to-night—now," he cried, passionately. "You have raised the fiend within me, and you shall know all that I know, if—if you really refuse to listen to my love."

So he broke off once more to plead, in the madness of this selfish and ambitious passion he called love; and still she answered him with kindness in her firm refusal.

Then, in the heat and anger of this blow, for which he even yet was unprepared, there came from his stern lips that information on the effect of which he built his last desperate hope—that the one man whose name she never uttered to him, yet about whom his suspicion and jealousy had wrapped themselves with a strength and tenacity which might well convince him of their truth, was the man convicted, eleven years before, for the murder of the old miser whose wealth she now possessed.

"The man who, from the cell where he lay under sentence of death, had craftily escaped; and now, at large again, was continuing his rascally career."

"You have told me this before," said Honor, "only perhaps not quite so decidedly and circumstantially. I asked

you then for evidence to prove the truth of what you asserted."

"Yes ; I told you before," exclaimed Lawrence, more hastily than he would have done if he had felt full reliance on the strength of the clue he handled so eagerly and uncertainly ; "and, as it is the truth, I have told you again. I feel myself your guardian still, Honor ; and I cannot let you be duped and deceived before my very eyes."

"There is no fear," said Honor, quietly ; "and this you know."

"I told you something else of Gabriel Myddelton, last time we spoke of him," blurted out Mr. Haughton, never trusting himself to pause between his speeches. "I told you he was a married man, and *that* I can prove—unless he is guilty of another crime, as base in some men's eyes as the murder itself. Ah ! you had guessed this ?" he cried, excitedly, as he read her face with shrewd intentness ; "you are moved at last, to feel that you have counted among your friends a criminal and a debauchee ?"

"I was moved," said the girl, knowing how, for one moment, her courage had deserted her because her thoughts flew back to that one day she had spent at Westleigh Towers, "I was moved by an old memory. Please leave me now ; I do not want to hear another word of—Gabriel Myddelton."

"Nor to see him again—do you, Honor ?" cried Mr. Haughton, in the excitement of his sudden, selfish hope. "You must shrink even from *looking* on a man who forces his way into society under false pretences, with a false name and false character—a reckless scoundrel who dares his fate."

"Of whom are you speaking, Lawrence ?"

He started at the cold, proud tone.

"Of Gabriel Myddelton, or Royden Keith—as *you* will ?"

"You say Gabriel Myddelton is daring his fate under the false name of Royden Keith, of Westleigh Towers ? Then is the society in which he is received so blind, and dense, and easily duped as that ? Tell me how this name and the estate of Westleigh Towers belong to Gabriel Myddelton ? Would not any account of the landed gentry show you the pedigree of Royden Keith, of Westleigh Towers ?"

"No," said Lawrence, with a ready sneer, "else do you think I would have been for *one* hour in doubt ? The last

possessor of Westleigh Towers, an old man in his dotage, having no heir, left his estate and property to a young man who paid him all sorts of interested attentions during the last few months of his life. They met in Germany, where old Mr. Keith died. He belonged to a good family, and the young man to whom he took this idiotic fancy, and to whom he left his name as well as his wealth, reaps the benefit of that. What is stated as his previous name is of course of no importance to us, as it was in his power to give any lie he chose ; and as for the pedigree they may have chosen to invent for this unknown, nameless fellow, why, only an idiot would rely upon it."

"Could you not trace it without regard to printed statements?" asked Honor, carried away by her own earnestness. "Could you not prove Royden Keith to have been an honourable English gentleman before he took the honoured name he bears?"

"No," returned the lawyer promptly ; "no one could prove that."

"Can no one, at any rate, prove who he was?—for *you* have not done so, Lawrence."

"I have satisfied myself," returned Mr Haughton, betraying his own weak point by the very impatience of his reply ; "I can do no more."

"In that case," said Honor, gravely, "*I* will have it done"

He gazed at her steadily and keenly ; but the swift thought that she must be in jest could only live for one instant. He read in her face the earnest purpose which (though he did not know it) had been for so long quietly pursued ; and he saw that her motive was generous, and that her search would be directed so that no shadow of suspicion should rest where he had crowded it. Reading this, he saw more plainly than he had ever seen them, even in his frequent moments of depression, the flaws in his own evidence, and the yawning chasm which broke his straight advance towards the longed-for identification of old Myddelton's murderer with Royden Keith.

"Honor," he cried, with a sudden desperate appeal, as he felt his hold sliding from him, and knew that only truth and justice could weigh aught with her, "let this subject rest between us. He is not worthy of one thought of

yours ; and—and, Honor, I will say no word of his crime again if you will only give me the love I ask. He shall go unconvicted and unsuspected—I promise it. I swear it. No one in England shall know that he is other than the man he pretends to be, if you will only give me the answer I have sought in those letters. Will you, Honor ? Will you, my darling ? ”

“ Long ago I gave you my answer to those letters,” she said. “ I have no other to give now or ever ; and you will not, I trust, ever write such to me again, for I do not like to have to burn my cousin’s letters unread, and such as those I *must* treat so.”

“ Then, if you burn my letters,” cried Lawrence, passionately, “ I must come myself, for you shall listen to me at last. You shall feel that no one could ever love you as I love you.”

“ That is enough, Lawrence. When I have found the clue I seek, I will send to you.”

“ I could help you in this, Honor,” he urged, eagerly ; “ you will need such help as I can give. Take my services, and I will promise ”——

“ No, thank you,” replied Honor, gently ; and she stood with an unmistakable desire for his departure.

But, if he saw the hint, he did not take it. Once more, and as desperately as if he felt it would be the last time, he urged that wearisome plea of his, every repetition of which he knew to be real pain to her.

And still she parted from him kindly at last, remembering that he was her cousin, and had been her guardian, and forgetting, by a generous effort, that he was the selfish and jealous suitor “ whose love-suit had been to her as fearful as a siege.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

I, then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,

To be so pestered with a popinjay,

Answered neglectingly I know not what.

Henry IV.

LADY SOMERSON’S balls were always among the pleasantest and most brilliant of the season. and no one felt that this

first ball of the spring of '72 would be an exception to the rule. As host and hostess, Sir Philip Somerson and his lady had no rivals. To their perfect courtesy and high breeding they added a hearty geniality; to their thorough experience of the world of fashion they added real freshness of enjoyment; and beyond their abundant wealth and opportunities, they possessed the tact to discern what elements would blend in their assemblies, and form one gay and harmonious whole. Dancing was never allowed to grow wearisome in Lady Somerson's house, but was as fresh and keen an enjoyment as it is possible to be in May and June; music was never pressed upon those who did not care either to listen or perform, but was a treat and rest, as music should be. Conversation never seemed to drag or droop, but brightly and pleasantly passed through the different groups.

"I should not wonder"—so her ladyship had remarked to her husband when discussing this ball—"if it does not turn out eventually to have been the best ball of the season."

"Nor should I, my dear," assented Sir Philip, cordially; "yours generally do."

But this was only an anticipation, and whether this had been the best ball of the season could only be decided when the brilliant rooms had shrunk into a dejected condition of holland and cobwebs, and the tale of some few lives had been told.

But who could dream to-night of cobwebs in these rooms? Who could picture a weary ending to these lives?

"I think," mused Lady Somerson, looking round upon the brilliant scene, with a dancing light in her kind eyes, "that I never saw more happy faces."

"Mrs. Trent—Miss Trent—Captain Trent."

The start which the hostess gave was even perceptible to the group around her, but in an instant she moved forward to greet her guests, and her courteous manner betrayed neither surprise nor want of cordiality.

Mrs. Trent and Theodora had been, from time immemorial, invited regularly to Lady Somerson's balls, as country neighbours of Sir Philip's; but on this occasion Mrs. Trent had written her reply from Deergrove, regretting that she and her daughter were not likely to be in town on

that date. So Lady Somerson, with a sigh that sounded laden with relief, had given up all expectation of their society ; and, forgetting that the note had been so worded as to leave the invitation open, had overlooked their possible presence until their names were thus suddenly announced.

Of course she did not utter a word of surprise on seeing these guests, but she did remark quietly to her husband, that she could not understand why Mrs. Trent and her daughter should come up to London so suddenly ; and that she did not like what she could not understand.

Sir Philip laughed a little over her logic, only observing that it was rare to find women doing what one *could* understand.

"No, I do not like it," reiterated his lady, evidently puzzled. "And I am vexed, too, that Mr. Keith is not come. I suppose it is too late to expect him now."

Sir Philip laughed again.

"Of course he will come, for he promised. But why are you so covetous ? You have plenty of young men here now, wealthy, young, and marriageable. There is the Duke of Hartreigh, what more can you wish ?"

"I wish for Mr. Keith."

The host and hostess separated then, and presently Lady Somerson moved aside to speak to Captain Trent, where she could not be overheard.

"The arrival of your aunt and cousin was a surprise," Hervey, she said. "Had you known they were in London ?"

"Had not the faintest idea," returned Hervey, raising his fair eyebrows. "Only last night I left them at Deergrove."

"Indeed ?"

Lady Somerson said no more, and to Hervey the word and her ladyship's glance were totally devoid of expression.

"They telegraphed for me as soon as they arrived, and of course I was obliged to go and escort them here, though Honor had told me I might come with her."

"A disappointment," smiled Lady Somerson, "but soon over. It was all one when you reached here."

"Not quite," began Hervey, and his hostess understood the insinuation, though she thought it best to ignore it, because, for the time, both he and Mrs. Trent were her own

guests. She walked away with a smile, her eyes following his fretful gaze.

Honor Craven, her beauty matchless among many beautiful and graceful forms, her dress unexcelled in its fairy elegance, though no colour relieved it, sat in a perfect crowd of solicitous cavaliers, foremost among whom was the young Duke, on whom the hopes of so many mothers and daughters were fixed.

"The girl enjoys it," mused Lady Somerson, the smile still on her lips; "and it is but natural to her girlhood that she should. Yet in this adulation, constantly reminded as she is of her surpassing beauty and her marvellous wealth, she is just the girl she was in her guardian's home; always gentle, and obedient, and unselfish; always bright, and perhaps a little saucy. Yet even now I can see that she has not reached her height of happiness. Yes, though she is the same girl I loved years ago in her lonely orphanage, she has grown years beyond me now, and I feel as if her life must hold many a pain I could not comprehend; but it will hold joys too—joys too, if God please."

Captain Trent had kept beside his hostess, and his face brightened with the realisation of his hope when she paused in the coterie surrounding Honor, and the girl joined her with delight.

"Listen!—what a valse!" cried the hostess, presently, with a mischievous glance at Hervey, who was making strenuous but futile efforts to exhibit himself as a shining light in the jest and badinage which made the group so merry a one. "I must not forget myself and linger here; but I shall return presently to see if you have all found partners."

And so saying, Lady Somerson glided on, to assist shy men and bashful maidens. The Duke of Hartreigh, in a state of sudden excitement, apparently awaking to the fact that the blissful hours were passing away, and he had not yet had one dance, pleaded with Miss Craven for the honour of her hand. Hervey came forward, more eagerly still, to claim now the fulfilment of her promise to him; and a host of other partners stood waiting for her refusal, that their own claims might be advanced. Pleasantly, though promptly, Honor declined his Grace's arm; but his Grace still

hovered beside her, finding a greater charm in her proximity than any which the brilliant suite of rooms could otherwise afford him.

"Mr. Keith."

In the midst of his flattering nonsense, the young duke paused with a sudden surprise, which all his native courtesy failed to hide ; for, when the simple name of this late guest had been announced, Honor's face had inexplicably, yet unmistakably, changed ; over its glowing brilliancy a strange, still look had fallen ; her beautiful eyes had saddened, although it was only for one moment that they had left his face ; and her lips had met in a quivering compression. *Now*, when she set aside his entreaty to dance, she did it even more quietly than before ; but he felt, beyond a doubt, that this negative was decisive.

The Duke stood moodily watching this late comer. He knew him well, and liked him very little, for in his presence, as in the presence of no other man, the Duke of Hartreigh felt a sensation of jealousy which was as unusual to him as it was unpleasant. Yes, he could even be jealous of a man who looked so often, as he looked to-night, chastened in heart and soul ; because he always stood, as he stood to-night, pre-eminently distinguished even in a distinguished throng.

"Honor," entreated Captain Trent, "do give me this valse—you promised me one."

"Do not ask me, Hervey," she urged gently, and almost sadly, "I could not valse just now."

A few of the hopeless satellites moved away to seek other partners for the dance ; and Honor, turning aside where her eyes could not fall on Royden, let Hervey lead her where he would.

It would be impossible to say exactly how it happened, but as soon as Royden Keith and his hostess separated, he found himself beside Theodora Trent, taking her outstretched hand, and answering the many questions which flowed in succession from her smiling lips. Mrs. Trent pointed her fan affably to a vacant seat beside her, and Royden, in his easy courtesy, took it, and entered into a merry hall-room conversation. Acting up to her long education, the matron gradually drifted from the discourse, leaving Theodora in

her desired position. Miss Trent chatted for a time on trifling subjects, using all her powers of winning, for she would keep Mr. Keith beside her at any cost. But even Theodora, in all her self-conceit, knew that she dare not hope to keep him so for long, though she might use every winning power she possessed. She had resigned her one faint hope for this valse with him, but still she thought she might delicately convey a hint as to future dances.

"I know no band in London so pleasant to dance to," she observed.

"Nor I," he said, his eyes absently following the gliding figures; "it surprised me to find you sitting, Miss Trent."

Theodora flushed uncomfortably. During the whole of the last season the unpleasant consciousness had been dawning upon her that she was not so thoroughly what her mother called *successful* in society as she used to be. Whether the fretfulness, which in her nature was consequent on hope deferred, had more effect upon her face than she wot of, or whether fickle partners had grown a little weary of her superficial beauty and shallow remarks; or whether the halo of old Myddelton's wealth had not had something to do with her previous triumphs, was not even known to Theodora herself. The only fact certain was that, in spite of her regular features and stylish toilettes, in spite of her own talent and her mother's Macchiavellian skill, she was not unfrequently observed sitting moodily aside now, while plainer girls took her old place in the dances she was so fond of.

"I reserved this one," she answered, with her old disregard for truth. "I shall have quite sufficient later on to-night."

"Doubtless," said Royden, quietly.

He was watching a distant group, and his eyes were grave and intent. Theodora's followed them, then returned with angry swiftness.

"Do you notice, Mr. Keith"—she asked the question in a soft, deliberate tone, looking into his face with a smile—"how my cousin has been spoiled by her extraordinary acquisition of old Myddelton's money? I remember her quite a nice, unaffected girl when she lived at The Larches, and had only forty pounds a year of her own. Indeed I

grew quite fond of her then, and asked her to come to our house—as you may recollect.”

“The first time I met Miss Craven was at your house. I recollect it perfectly.”

Theodora glanced furtively up into Royden's quiet face. His eyes were still on the distant group, and the easy tone it was impossible to read.

“But now”—— added Miss Trent, then paused with a slight, and not inelegant, gesture of disgust. When, in the few seconds of silence which followed, the mortifying consciousness forced itself upon her that both the gesture and the insinuation had been lost upon her listener, she had recourse to speech again. “Everyone notices this change, I grieve to say, Mr. Keith; and one can but regret that unexpected wealth, and mixing in society to which she has not been accustomed, should have had such an injurious effect upon her.”

“To what injurious effect do you allude?”

Theodora laughed softly, a laugh that was not good to hear.

“Now, Mr. Keith, you *must* have noticed the change in Honor, and you ought to own it.”

“Yes, I have noticed a change in Miss Craven.”

Miss Trent sought curiously for an explanation of the new intonation in his voice, but sought in vain.

“Of course you have,” she said, graciously betraying a full comprehension; “many people remark upon it. Hervey says it pains him very much.”

“To all appearance,” remarked Royden, in her interrogatory pause, “Captain Hervey enjoys pain.”

Theodora's lips were set in angry compression as she saw —what she knew that *he* saw—how utterly and eagerly Captain Trent was at that moment devoting himself to the girl whose changed conduct had *pained* him.

“I think,” observed Miss Trent, in a tone whose resentment, though suppressed, was sufficiently evident to her companion, “that you, Mr. Keith, must see—men are so much quicker to detect weaknesses in our sex than we ourselves are—how persistently Honor tempts my cousin to appear everywhere in her shadow. Of course this is easy for her now; Hervey sees how her wealth procures her every-

where the services of all ambitious and money-loving men ; and of course he is pleased to appear in the train of the wealthiest girl in England. But though Honor understands exactly how it is, she flirts a great deal too openly with him. Why, he is for ever with her ! ”

“ He is fortunate.”

“ I assure you he himself does not think so,” put in Theodora, with spiteful eagerness ; “ he thinks it often a great bore ; and besides that, he has a perpetual fear of her betraying her want of education, and humiliating him in public. When Honor was a girl at home, he very kindly instructed her in the usages of good society, and now, having entered society at last, she of course entirely depends upon him. Indeed, I tremble to think what blunders she would perpetually make but for his constant and timely advice. Knowing this, he is sorry to leave her unsupported.”

“ Do you think, Miss Trent,” inquired Royden, leaning forward, in his seat, and bringing his eyes slowly from the group he was studying, “ that the Duke of Hartreigh and those gentlemen whom we see hovering about Miss Craven now, eager for a word or glance—men of title, wealth, and celebrity—are *all* actuated by this generous feeling, or is Captain Trent a particular exception ? ”

“ Everyone knows *their* motives,” retorted Theodora, forgetting her gracious languor in the sudden jealous fear which seized her ; “ she is the personification of old Myddelton’s money, you recollect.”

“ Oh ! ”

“ Of course, as I said,” resumed Theodora, wondering over his short reply, “ the temptation which she can offer is not one which even Hervey can very well decline, though the position bores him. Like other men, he is easily led on to make his attentions conspicuous when he sees how very openly they are encouraged. If you lay this to Honor’s ignorance, of course it is very generous of you ; but I cannot help grieving over the marked change in her, and regretting that she has so little pride and modesty.”

“ As ? ”——

“ As to give encouragement to a whole crowd of suitors, and so demonstratively accept and parade in public the devotion they offer to her wealth.”

"I know more than one man, Miss Trent," observed Royden, "who has devoted himself to Miss Craven, not only without encouragement, but literally in the face of strong discouragement—and I believe Captain Trent to be doing so at this moment."

Theodora, whose gaze had been fixed on Captain Hervey's leaning figure, raised her head with a swift, vindictive glance, which she could not suppress in time.

"Honor Craven," she said, with cruel deliberation, "is, as everyone says, arrogantly proud of the money of which she so illegally obtained possession ; and is, besides that, a most unprincipled coquette."

He had risen from his seat as she spoke, but waited beside her until the last word was uttered, then answered, with quiet composure :

"On this subject it is utterly impossible for us to agree, Miss Trent, so it is better that we should not speak of it. I consider Miss Craven as far opposed to your description as light is opposed to darkness ; and so you understand how I must answer you, *if* I answer you at all on this subject."

He stood a moment or two after he had ceased speaking, then, with a bow, he walked away.

It was as he passed on his slow way from group to group, that presently he joined the coterie which lingered about Honor, and she put her hand into his, and smiled her beautiful smile. Yet, even in his first momentary glance, he read the truth. Lawrence Haughton had told her what he had threatened to tell. Afterwards, when he was alone, he tried in vain to remember how he had read this fact. Her smile was not flashing in its brilliancy as it used to be, and her words were not prompt and piquant, as of old—yet it was not these facts which told him. There had been no word or glance of suspicion, or even of curiosity ; no signs of coldness or repugnance ; yet, as Royden said to himself again and again in his solitude, she *had* heard Lawrence Haughton's story.

It was because he saw this in her face that he stayed beside her only for a few minutes. Knowing what history she had heard as the history of his past life, he knew that it must be painful to her to feel him near her. Knowing how his story had been told her, and by whom, he realised the

fact that evermore there must be an impassable barrier between them, and that it would be kinder to leave her untroubled by his presence.

The ball was only half over when Royden Keith bade adieu to his host and hostess, sorely against their wish. But he had not descended the staircase when Captain Hervey Trent came up to him.

"Keith," he began, with a rather eager assumption of familiarity, "stay a moment, will you? Honor has been asking me where you were, and she will be pleased with me, I daresay, if I take you to her. Will you come?"

"Thank you," returned Royden, showing no impatience for the speaker; "but Miss Craven did not, I fancy, send you to summon me."

"Oh! certainly not."

"If she had done so, I would have returned with you at once. As it is, you must excuse me."

"She did really wonder where you were," persisted Hervey. "They were talking of something nobody seemed to know anything about, and she said you would tell us, if you had not left. I know she would be glad if I took you back with me. Come."

Quietly, and in a very few words, Royden resisted the warm, familiar invitation; but still Captain Trent was not to be so easily shaken off.

"Why is it, Keith," he asked, very skilfully, as he fancied, treading ground which led to the solution of a troublesome speculation of his, "that you have avoided Honor all night. Has anything occurred?"

"Anything occurred!" repeated Mr. Keith, with a glance of slow and grave inquiry into his companion's face; "I do not understand."

"I mean," explained Hervey, not comprehending this glance, "I mean—you will not mind what I am going to say, I hope—" he added, blushing like a girl, although they were in comparative solitude on the staircase, "I mean, have you, or I should say, is there anything serious between you and Honor? You won't mind my asking, because I really am so anxious on this point."

"Any affairs of Miss Craven's which she wishes you to know she will doubtless tell you herself."

"But just assure me of that," persisted Hervey, with his characteristic density; "it will not make any real difference to you, and it might make a world of difference to me."

"I fail to see the possibility."

"Stop," cried Hervey, overtaking him as he walked slowly down the stairs and linking one arm in his; "don't be vexed, for after all it is a natural question, and would give you no trouble to answer."

No trouble! Just then, too, when he had formed that determination never to seek her companionship again, even, as it had ever been, only for a few minutes at a time.

"Let me, as the elder man, Captain Trent, advise you to leave every man to manage his own affairs without interference."

But Royden's reticence and this advice availed him nothing. Hervey Trent was so determinately bent upon setting his own mind at rest upon this one important point, and so terribly anxious to hear from Mr. Keith's own lips that Honor Craven and he were nothing to each other beyond ordinary acquaintances, that he intruded his company upon Royden up to the last moment such a thing was feasible, and reiterated, in various forms, his urgent request to be enlightened.

His heart, sore and troubled in its newly-gained knowledge of that barrier which, perhaps for ever, must be reared between them, Royden answered with a sadness which was yet free from sarcasm or scorn.

But up to the last instant, Hervey was impervious to this. Each one of his selfish, persistent questions touched an open wound, and Royden, but for the strong command he put upon himself, would have shaken the young man from him with contempt. But though his heart was sore and troubled, he bore this probing quietly, answering only with negligence where he might have answered with passion and contempt.

CHAPTER XXX.

Over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost.

TENNYSON.

THAT London season was a perfect dream of delight to Phoebe Owen. She had never been accustomed to indulge in fancies of any kind, but if she had, the wildest flight of her fancy could not have soared to such splendour, and ease, and variety, as that in which she revelled now in Honor's shadow. But not until months afterwards did she understand how much more of this happiness and unmixed pleasure had been owing to Honor herself than to the constant round of gaiety and brilliancy to which she gave the credit.

Never had Honor's nature held a grain of selfishness, but in this wealthy, courted life of hers the fact was more apparent to Phoebe than it had been in those old days at The Larches. Perhaps this was because Phoebe's perceptions were widening a little, now that the one idol on which for years they had been centred was—unwillingly, forsooth, but not the less ruthlessly—being withdrawn; but perhaps it was because the power which now lay in Honor's hands was broad and great. In any case the Kensington house was a home of almost unreal happiness and splendour to Phoebe, and the example of her cousin's life was of untold benefit to her.

Nor was she the only one to whom Honor made the grand old mansion into a beautiful and tempting home. From what, by her bright unvarying kindness and gentle steadfast help, she had rescued Hervey, he could only fully recognise a year afterwards, when he declared, with a humiliation which was new to him, yet of which he felt no shame—

"I can often see the pitiful sight of idle men lounging about town, who are only just what I myself should have been if Honor had not saved me; and, if I could do for them what she has done for me, I would; but then it is only the few who *can* do it."

Thus, for Hervey and for Phoebe, Honor made a home to

which they were brightly welcomed, and in its happy light, and under her loving influence, the old idle and selfish habits fell from them, too sickly to bear this pure, bright atmosphere.

But this was not all the good that Honor did, even in the very heart of that world of gaiety and unrest, while she reigned a queen triumphant, wielding her three-fold sceptre of beauty, youth, and wealth. Few who met her in the brilliant saloons where she was ever the prominent figure—worshipped openly as one whom it was natural to worship—could have guessed where many hours of the day had been spent, or how those hours had been used. Few could have guessed what generous gifts had been distributed quietly by the small white hands which it was a privilege to touch. Few could have guessed what comforting and strengthening words had been uttered by the lips whose smile was reward for hours of indefatigable attendance, and few could have guessed how anxious to do good was the girlish heart whose zest in all amusements was as fresh as if that heart were *not* strong and steadfast for its work in the solemn battle of life.

No ; few could have guessed, although there were times when the girl drooped wearily under the burden of her great responsibility, and could almost longingly recall that old life, whose only gleams of brilliance had been day-dreams of wild and sweet impossibilities. Her dreams were of future still—poor Honor !—when she allowed them to come at all ; but her own was not the central figure now, as it had been in those old times ; indeed, her own was rarely there at all ; and *these* dreams were all grey, and chill, and lonely. Now and then, but rarely, came back to her that autumn day when she had walked beside Royden while he told her how he loved her ; or that evening, when, in his own home, she had turned with negligence from the same story. But when such memories did come, she stifled them as if they hurt her, and then returned those haunting dreams of the future, in which she saw him always alone, solitary, and unhappy ; watched and suspected ; always alone in the crowds which clustered about him, and even in whose merriment he joined—a man standing apart. So she saw him, chastened in heart and intellect ; and it was this constant haunting thought of his grave and solitary life which brought that

dreamy sadness to her eyes so often, and kept at bay all thought of love and close companionship.

They met often. In the whirl of life into which both were so eagerly tempted, it was impossible it should be otherwise ; but there was always now a barrier between them which, though invisible, was inexorably impassable ; and which it must be impossible ever to pass again, because neither could speak of it unless in that horrible alternative of Lawrence Haughton's carrying his threat into execution, and making his suspicion public. As yet Mr. Haughton had taken no step towards this result, beyond one more threatening interview with Honor, in which he had shown her the burnt scrap of paper which he had so long guarded under lock and key, and of which he had before only told her. Honor, standing opposite him, while he insisted on showing it to her, bent and examined it, though apparently the scarred fragment possessed very little interest for her. Lawrence could not see her eyes, and waited so long in vain for any remark which might betray her conviction or fear that at last, in despair, he reminded her harshly of this incontrovertible evidence. She raised her face slowly, and answered in her usual tones.

"*Dear Gabriel*, those are the words you bid me read ; but I see no interest in them, Lawrence. I might easily write such words of my own cousin Gabriel, if I chose—to any one," she added, with peculiar emphasis.

And then she turned away, muttering that the room was so warm it made her feel faint ; and putting her hand to her head, she closed her eyes one moment, turning white as death.

"The letter," observed Mr. Haughton, while he watched her narrowly, "was written to the man who calls himself Royden Keith, and it is so commenced—*dear Gabriel*—in a lady's hand."

"I do not think so," replied Honor, in that quiet tone of dissent to which her old guardian should have been accustomed now. "We women, as a rule, use capitals in such a case. I think these words came in the middle of the letter."

"Absurd," interposed the lawyer, with impatience. "Yet even if it were so, what difference would that make ? If

she must call him 'dear Gabriel' in the middle of the letter as well as at the beginning, like a love-sick"—

"I do not understand the necessity of discussing this, Lawrence."

"Yes, you do—you must," he retorted; "and you would be mad to pretend that there is any loophole for escape from my conviction. To address the one to whom you write as 'dear Gabriel' is a pretty incontrovertible proof that Gabriel is the name of the person to whom the letter is sent. You see it so yourself, as plainly as I see it."

"Gabriel is not a—a very uncommon name," said Honor, and Mr. Haughton's hopes rose a little, for he read the anguish of suspicion which she tried in vain to hide.

The interview had not ended there, for the old suit had been again desperately urged, and the old promise repeated, in vain; but after this he had taken no further step forward in his threatened bringing to justice of old Myddelton's murderer; and Honor rightly surmised that her old guardian was too astute a lawyer to make his accusation public until he held an unbroken thread of evidence.

Sometimes Honor and Theodora Trent met in society, but not very often, as there were limits to the circle in which Mrs. and Miss Trent displayed their graces, and even within these limits Honor Craven's presence was eagerly sought. Except for a passing regret that old ties and memories could be so ruthlessly snapped by jealousy, it made no difference to Honor when Theodora happened to be in the same assembly. She invariably spoke to her, though no longer like an old friend, as she used to do, for Miss Trent's marked glances and innuendoes could not be misunderstood. If it had been possible, Theodora would have robbed Honor of the admiration and the love she gained so easily; but being utterly impossible, Miss Trent was fain to content herself with dropping casual and infectious hints, or expressing all that looks and gestures could express. And it could hardly be that these poisonous words and glances could fall as harmlessly on everyone as they had fallen on Royden Keith.

In those meetings, which were so brief, between himself and Honor, she was ever very quiet, just as she might have been if she had feared to trust herself. And he, noticing

that always at his coming there would fall over her face a stillness which looked like weariness, made those meetings fewer and more brief, as the London season neared its zenith. Even Phœbe noticed that this silence fell upon her cousin even when she only mentioned Royden's name, and it taught the girl a new experience, and even a new wisdom. Her cousin, whose love and brightness had made the only sunshine her life had ever held, who was so much better, and wiser, and brighter than herself, though five years younger, had some soreness at heart, in spite of all the splendour and the luxury about her, in spite of her beautiful houses and her host of lovers, in spite of her talents and her great beauty.

The only relief for sorrow of any kind, which had come within the radius of Miss Owen's imagination, was reciprocity ; yet Honor did not avail herself of this. Whatever this soreness at heart might be, Honor bore it silently and alone, letting no shadow of her grief fall upon the path she made so bright for others. It taught the elder girl a lesson, too, of patience and unselfishness ; not unneeded, though Honor's daily example had made her now a pleasant companion, sympathetic, if still excitable, and kind in her harmless pursuit of pleasure. She was, as Hervey told her one day, in a tone of approval which was equally new and pleasant to Phœbe, "losing her gushing proclivities, and was wonderfully the gainer by the loss."

And Hervey meant what he said. He had forgiven her intrusion into the Kensington mansion, because, under Honor's skilful management, he was made to feel only the pleasant effect of her society ; and it was impossible, seeing Honor's treatment of them both, for him to dream of Phœbe as an interloper. So, gradually he grew to believe what Honor had meant him to believe that it was altogether a pleasant arrangement. True, there were still times when he wished for nothing on earth so strongly as Phœbe's absence ; but then the feeling wore itself out as Honor's conduct to himself still continued to keep all lover-like ambition at bay, and still more rapidly wore itself out as Phœbe's silly moods grew rarer ; as common sense leavened her ecstasies, and the desire to please, rather than charm, lightened her somewhat heavy and disjointed converse.

So life went on in London, and Honor, ever working ceaselessly and patiently to probe that secret of old Myddelton's murder, was still gay, and sweet, and piquante in the society in which she was courted, walking as it seemed ever brightly in her path of roses, though the burden of a pain, unshared and unspoken of, pressed upon her.

She had arranged to go to Abbotsmoor early in July, and though Phœbe could not look forward with unmixed pleasure to leaving the London world, which was so full of delight for her, she could still find solace in the prospect of reigning with Honor in the now beautiful mansion which, in their childhood, had seemed to them an Aladdin's palace in its shroud, behind whose rust and cobwebs slept a wonderful grandeur. In this grandeur she was to be almost equal to Honor, and there would always be guests and gaiety, although Honor would be sure to work there in carrying out those curious projects of hers for the good of the poor, who had been so long neglected by the possessors of old Myddelton's money and estate, and even for the good of many who, in this great city, struggled upon the hard highway of life, or fell and fainted on the battle-plain.

"And if all these things I shall be useless," mused Phœbe, not—to her credit—in her unwillingness to help, but in the consciousness of her own incapacity. "But"—and this was her consolatory conclusion—"June is not gone yet."

The certainty of this fact was especially refreshing to her on the morning before the ball which Honor was to give in her mansion at Kensington, on one of the last days of that hot summer month.

"It will be such a superb party," Phœbe exclaimed in rapture; "won't it, Honor?"

Honor, smiling, said she hoped so; and then dreamed over it quietly, seeing most clearly among the crowd that one figure which, in those dreams of hers, always seemed to stand apart. "Surely for this night he would come," she thought. "We are going away so soon, and he has accepted my invitation. Oh, he is sure to come."

Merrily all that day the girls ran about the great house, taking such a fresh and childish pleasure in the preparations, that great was the astonishment of the solemn

servants, as well as of the workmen and women, who found it hard to ply their hammers and their needles with a befitting gravity.

"What are you thinking of, Honor?" inquired Phœbe, when they sat resting over their afternoon tea.

"I was recalling," said Honor, sitting lazily opposite her cousin, who, in a state of suppressed excitement, presided over the exquisite little tea equipage, "I was recalling the parties—rare as old china—which we used to have at The Larches. Weren't we always in a state of ferment, little Frau? and wasn't our anxiety intense over our dresses?"

"Mine was," modified Phœbe, with honesty. "And do you remember how angry Jane used to be when you produced some unexpected game or luxury, on which you had surreptitiously spent all your pocket-money, hoping to glean a little fun from it?"

"Such humble purchases, too," mused Honor, smiling.

"They seem so now," returned Phœbe, looking round the beautiful rooms, and thinking of the gorgeous and lavish preparations for Honor's ball; "but we thought them tremendous then, and Jane always pronounced them absurd and ruinous extravagance."

"I remember once, before a dinner party," said Honor, laughing, "I went into Kinbury and speculated in a box of crackers. It was Christmas time, and they looked pretty and might provoke a laugh, I thought. I hid them away when I got home, only intending to bring them out at the last moment, for fear of not being allowed to exhibit them, but of course Jane found them, and forbid me to put them on the table. Picture woe like mine!"

"I remember," said Phœbe, growing dismal over even the recollection; "and I cried, and told Lawrence, and he scolded Jane, and ordered them to be put just where you chose, and you were vexed with me, and hid the crackers. And don't you remember, Honor, that we found them the autumn after, and took them with us to the Statton Woods when we went to sketch; and Hervey joined us. Oh, you remember!" cried Phœbe, springing up to look if Honor's cup was empty, "and he wanted to crack them all with you, and pretended the mottoes were true. Such a contrast to Mr. Keith, who came with him that day,

and never offered to crack one with you, but all the while turned to me. It was a novelty for me," concluded the elder cousin, smiling, "because Hervey was always eager to join with you in everything; and as for Lawrence"——

But Phœbe paused there. Not even yet could she finish calmly any allusion to her guardian's indifference to herself, and undisguised love for Honor, though each day—as she herself was now aware—it was growing easier for her.

"How many dances have you promised Hervey for to-night?" inquired Honor, simply for the purpose of turning the conversation. And from that point the girls' talk hovered merrily about the coming ball, until their sociable afternoon rest was over, and they ran off again to inspect the hanging of the silver lamps which gleamed in purity among the flowers.

"All finished now," said Honor, smiling at Phœbe's ecstatic gestures when they paid their last visit to the reception-rooms, which from end to end were like a fairy palace of brilliancy and beauty, with softly-treading servants moving here and there like phantom forms which should vanish when the dazzling figures of the guests should take their place. "All finished, little Frau, and this *may* be a very happy night?"

"Why only *may* be?" asked Phœbe. "Of course it will be; every single person you care for has accepted your invitation, Honor. Why are you doubtful?"

"Because," said the girl, bringing her lustrous gaze, from the vista of drapery and exotics, "because I feel that this night must be *very* happy, or very —— Come, though, let us decorate ourselves, little Frau, now that the rooms are decorated," and she turned and raced away from Phœbe, just as she used to do when they were children, and the sturdy limbs of the little Frau had no chance against the speed of her willowy little cousin.

Though Honor's rooms seemed filled with guests that night, for her there was one great vacancy. The girlish hostess, in her bright loveliness and thoughtful cordiality, seemed happy and content amid her guests, yet her heart beat painfully as every name was announced, and her eyes saddened for a moment in the silence which followed.

Eleven—twelve—one—two—three. The dawning of the June morning, and Honor's guests folding their cloaks about them—or allowing their partners to do so--and telling each other that they never *had* enjoyed themselves so much before, or that they were tired to death, as the case might be. The sleepy coachmen drawing up their horses in the wide and silent street, where the fair light of morning fell already.

Four! The last guests gone! the last sleepy footman closing his carriage-door upon torn lace and crumpled flowers; and the last sleepy coachman driving his horses from before the lighted mansion. A chilly silence, which must have crept in with the dawn, had fallen upon the gorgeous rooms. Phœbe was actually shivering when she ran back into the deserted ball-room to look for her cloak. In an instant her searching gaze was intercepted.

"Honor," she whispered, hurrying anxiously up to where her cousin sat with her face hidden among the pillows of a couch. "Honor, darling, what is it? Honor, dear," she pleaded again, in the silence, "what is it?"

Her vocabulary was not varied, but her tone was anxious, and Honor raised her head and smiled.

"Is it," questioned Phœbe, inquisitive in all her sympathy, "because Mr. Keith did not come?"

"I am tired, Phœbe. I—think that is all."

"And no wonder you are tired, Honor, I'm sure," exclaimed Miss Owen; "such a splendid ball, and you did your part so nicely, too." "But still," she added, watching Honor's efforts to cast off this dreamy sadness, "it is strange about Mr. Keith. He accepted your invitation, and sent no excuse afterwards. Yet he has always been so courteous that if he had known he could not come, I am sure he would have"——

"He did not care to come, I think," said Honor, and rose as wearily as if half a century, instead of half a day, had rolled over since she had raced up and down the stairs with Phœbe.

"Oh! Honor," cried the elder cousin, quite ready to turn the conversation, "what a successful ball it has been! As Hervey says, everything you arrange must be a success. He says he never enjoyed a ball so much in his life, and

though my experience hasn't been very large, as you will say, I say so, too, as seriously as he said it. How kind you were to him to-night, Honor, and yet"—

"What?" asked Honor, absently, when she paused.

"I was going to say," replied Phœbe, "and yet you never seemed before so utterly unconscious of his attentions, and were only kind to every one the same."

"You were kind to Hervey, too, I'm glad to say, dear little Frau," said Honor, ready, as she always was, to sympathise with every feeling of others, let her own thoughts or pain be what it would.

"To-morrow," whispered Phœbe, when the girls parted at last in Honor's dressing-room, "Mr. Keith is to be one of Lady Somerson's party for the opera, and he will explain his absence to-night."

"Yes," said Honor, gently, as she returned her cousin's kiss, and knew the words had been said to cheer her. "Perhaps he will."

It may have been that anticipation which had brought the brilliance back to her eyes when she stood beside Phœbe's bed, in the bright summer noon.

"Up already!" exclaimed Miss Owen, rising to a sitting posture, and gazing astonished into the bright, sweet face.

"I have been up a long time," smiled Honor; "I have been walking in the gardens. It is such a beautiful morning, Phœbe."

"We have four engagements for to-day," cried Miss Owen. "Oh! I'm glad you woke me, Honor. I will ring at once."

All that day there was an excitement about Honor which puzzled Phœbe not a little; an excitement which made her beauty dazzling to many eyes that night, when she sat in Lady Somerson's box at Drury Lane, and waited, to all seeming, only for the rising of the curtain.

"Honor"—Sir Philip was whispering to her from his seat behind—"Keith was to have joined us here to-night, but I suppose we shall be disappointed, as we were last night. Of course you understand his absence, though we do not?"

"No, Sir Philip."

A look of surprise passed between the baronet and his wife.

"Then who can do so?" wondered Lady Somerson.

"I"—but Honor's answer broke off into a subdued exclamation as the orchestra struck up the opening bars of the overture. "It is *Faust*! I—I forgot."

Lady Somerson looked down wonderingly into her favourite's face. She had no remembrance of that night at Deergrove when Royden Keith had asked her to sing as Marguerite to his Faust; and she could not understand why the girl's face should grow so white and sad. Of course Honor had heard the opera often, both abroad and at home, but never, as now, had it brought back, with a vivid reality, that summer evening when, in his quiet, masterly way, he had made her sing with him, and made that singing different from all other singing she had ever joined in.

Lady Somerson grew unaccountably anxious and ill at ease; and but that she saw Honor had no wish to leave the theatre, she would willingly herself have forfeited the opera, that she might take the girl away. No; though so white and still, Honor sat engrossed, breathed softly, and drinking in, with intense sympathy, the passion and the pathos of the music, and of the scenes before her.

The curtain fell at last, and the hearts that had ached, and the eyes that had wept, met each other with smiles and jests. But Honor's face had not regained its colour, nor had the dreamy sadness left her eyes, though she received with pleasant thanks the eagerly offered attentions of the gentlemen who clustered into Sir Philip's box, hating each other piously during the doubtful moments before Sir Philip came to the fore, and frankly chose her an escort.

"You will go home with Lady Somerson to supper, Honor, won't you?" whispered Phoebe. "She asked us because we are going with her to Lord Selie's, and it will be so nice. Will you?"

"If you wish it," said Honor, gently; and they went.

But Lady Somerson, in her kind-heartedness, saw more than Phoebe did, and more than Hervey, who, to his delight, was included in the invitation to Sir Philip's "opera supper." She knew, too, what Honor would like; so, when the time came for them to adjourn to Lord Selie's assembly (in which she knew only too well that the old programme would be repeated, and that Honor must receive the ever-

recurring routine of flattery and pursuit). Lady Somerson coolly announced her intention of staying at home, smiling a little, just as if she had done a clever thing, when she placidly received Honor's request to stay with her.

As the girl's own chaperon was not of Lady Somerson's party that night, Phoebe was placed under Sir Philip's special care, but, at the last moment, she turned with a touch of self-denial which Honor was quick to appreciate.

"Let me stay with you," she whispered, "or let us go home together. I can see that you are tired, and not well. I would rather go home with you, Honor."

"Why, my dear little Frau," said Honor, brightly, "I am staying at home for my own pleasure, and it will be quite spoiled unless you go for yours. Good night. Good night, Hervey. No need to say I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

Captain Trent stood dubiously and dolefully beside her, trying in vain to make her comprehend how impossible for him was any enjoyment in which she did not participate, and how much happier he would be to stay with her. But this was Lady Somerson's house, and he had been invited with the understanding that he was engaged afterwards, as were the whole party. So Hervey, still a salient worshipper of good form, knew that such communication would be in bad taste.

Sir Philip Somerson had, for the first few minutes, wondered over his wife's change of plan, but her motive had then dawned upon him, and he took Phoebe under his protection, in his courtly, genial way.

When she and Honor were left alone together, Lady Somerson, moved by some incontrollable impulse, put her arms about the girl who, though so rich and idolised, was young and motherless. Then she kissed her softly, and began to chat in a tone which seemed quite easy in its intense kindness.

"Now, Honor, darling, you and I are going to have a quiet, enjoyable time; but I am so liberally endowed with that essentially feminine virtue which laid Eden waste, that I must take one step before I can experience any 'peace of mind, dearer than all.' First of all I ring for tea; no two women ever did sit down to spend a few hours together

without requiring tea, did they? But I am ringing for another purpose, too, for I want to send a message of inquiry to Jermyn Street."

She did not glance towards Honor either as she spoke or while she gave the message to the footman, but when she did look she fancied there was more relief upon the girl's face than surprise.

"Yes," she continued, standing at the tea-table, as the door closed behind the servant; "I must satisfy my womanly inquisitiveness, and I do not expect one of my own sex to blame me—remember that, my dear."

A whole hour passed before the man returned with his tidings, and that hour the two friends spent pleasantly, as two friends can spend an hour in ease and indolence, when no gaunt secret or mist of suspicion and distrust hovers between them.

"What is it?"

The servant had returned, and Lady Somerson turned her head lazily, as it seemed, for his message; yet she need hardly have schooled her face, for Honor's eyes—lustrous in their great and speechless anxiety—were fixed only upon this possible bearer of a message from Royden Keith.

"I saw Mr. Pierce, my lady, as you wished. He was very anxious. He had sent off one of Mr. Keith's grooms to Westleigh Towers to inquire if his master was there, and another to Kinbury; he himself was just coming here to see Sir Philip—even late as it is. He is alarmed, I think, my lady, about his master."

"What do you mean? What did he say—exactly?"

Honor's eyes had not stirred from the man's face; her hands were locked together in her lap, and her breath came quickly and irregularly as she waited.

"He said, my lady, that last night, just as Mr. Keith was going to start to Kensington, to Miss Craven's ball, a message was brought him which was to be delivered specially and privately to himself, and so which of course Mr. Pierce did not hear. He said, my lady, that this message must have changed all his master's plans, for he went out at once with the messenger, never mentioning where he was going, or when he should return. The messenger was a woman, my lady, which Mr. Pierce thought very curious

and suspicious ; and he is sure his master intended to return directly, because he only put an overcoat on, and went as he was, in full dress. Yet he did not return, my lady—he never has returned.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

Suffer love: a good epithet! I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will. *Much Ado About Nothing.*

IN the pretty blue sitting-room, to which only a very few of Miss Craven's friends ever penetrated, Phœbe Owen sat next morning, looking out upon the passers-by, yet without criticising or studying their dress, as it had been her wont to do. In fact, she only looked down upon them by force of habit, and hardly saw them as she did so. There lay a new novel on the window-seat beside her, but for almost an hour its pages had not been turned.

Phœbe was thinking. It was a new art she had acquired, and it sat rather unfamiliarly upon her, but still the power lent her fair Dutch face a charm which it had never possessed while all her thought had been concentrated on her own shallow plans. Phœbe could feel now how those old years had been wasted ; and while she felt, as she often did, that the evil could never be undone, she was unconsciously undoing it. That regret for her own selfish and useless girlhood had only fluttered regretfully through her thoughts to-day, for they had been centred in loving anxiety upon her cousin.

“I cannot understand it,” she mused, leaning her head upon one plump hand, “I wish I could, and I wish I could help her. But somehow it seems as if no one could help her ; while she, even in her own anxiety, seems helping us all. She never even pretended to go to bed last night—this morning, I mean, for I was late returning, though Honor had promised to wait for me at Lady Somerson's. I went to bed and fell asleep at once, never guessing that Honor

was not in bed too. And her maid says she changed her dress, and sat quite still in her own room, reading and thinking, until it was possible to send for Mr. Stafford. Does she really think that he can explain this mysterious disappearance of Mr. Keith? Why should it alarm her—for that it does, I am quite sure, though she smiles and only says, 'Perhaps he was called suddenly abroad.' As if that were possible, and his valet not even know of it. How I wish Honor would come in here! She said she would, so I will wait, but she is a long time. Mr. Stafford has been here an hour or more. I wish she would come; but I wish, above all things, that I could help her."

And the wish was earnest and unselfish, as few of Phoebe's wishes had ever been before, and she had little idea—as she mused of the change in Honor—of the still greater, though so different, change in herself.

"Yes, I will wait, because Honor said she would come." And, for the twentieth time, she took up her book to read, while her eyes were raised to the door every minute, and her ears were open for the sound of a light footfall.

Phoebe had said truly that the lawyer had been far more than an hour closeted with Honor, but even when he rose to go, he had not dispelled the puzzled sadness on her face, and had gathered a great concern on his own.

"It is too long ago, Miss Craven," he said, again and again, most regretfully. "Except in the very improbable case of a confession from a possible murderer, no clue to hang suspicion on another can arise now. I have done all that can be done, so far as I may say so, but I have not met with the faintest shadow of success, and I fear I must add that I do not expect ever to do so."

"You will not cease this effort you are making?" urged Honor.

"I will not indeed," he answered, with gentle cordiality, grieved to see what he thought such futile earnestness, and knowing that, in spite of his great anxiety to serve her, he was powerless to do so in this matter.

"I know you will not, I know you are very kind," she said wistfully and humbly enough to show that it was possible to be young and beautiful and wealthy, yet to have the longing of the heart unsatisfied; "and I feel that it

will be possible—only so very hard—to prove at last the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton, my cousin.”

With a new curiosity in his keen gaze, the old lawyer looked down upon his client.

“It would be wiser, my dear Miss Craven, to let the matter rest. But as you evidently think otherwise,” he added, changing his tone when he saw her eyes sadden, “I will think otherwise, as far as I can—at any rate, we will do all that is possible. One of my clerks is at Abbotsmoor now, but, as I told you, his searches and inquiries seem utterly unavailing.

She thanked him for all his help and promises, and he made a kind, vain effort to cheer her; then he went away with his thoughts so full of the sad young face and earnest voice that he started from his long reverie in surprise to find that he had been driven two miles beyond his office door.

Left alone again, Honor tried to draw her thoughts away from this haunting subject.

“I will go to Phœbe,” she said, and yet she lingered in her solitude, struggling with her restlessness and uneasiness.

“You know whom alone I could ever ask to be my wife; and knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine will be.”

The words came back to her just as Royden had uttered them at Westleigh Towers nearly two years before, and she could not shake off their memory. She sat down to the piano and began to play, hoping that the chords might silence these words, but somehow they fitted to them all. Suddenly she rose with a sigh of pain, for her hands and thoughts—straying after melodies she knew—had unconsciously fallen upon the sad but exquisite funeral music of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and its pathos and tenderness were more than she could bear just now.

Covering her face with her hands, she tried to shame away these haunting thoughts of Royden. She tried to bring him before her as a man who lived with a false character, under a false name and false pretences, but he would not live so in her mind even for one minute, and she knew that, under all her pain for him, most strong and steadfast was the longing to see him.

"I will go to Marie," she said at last, rising and pushing the hair from her white face ; "she will wonder why I have not been."

Marie Verrien rose from her work when Honor entered the neat and pretty little room, and moved to meet her. This she did each day now, to show, in eager gratitude, how her strength was truly—though so very gradually—returning to her, in her new life of ease and abundance.

"A little farther again to-day, Marie," said Honor, her own sorrows set aside, as they always were, beside the sorrow and the joy of others. "It is wonderful ; you will walk downstairs soon."

"It is a little farther to-day, Miss Craven," said the lame girl, looking proudly back along the few yards she had walked. "I had grown frightened, wondering why you did not come, and that made me walk farther, being so rejoiced to see you coming in."

Honor gently led the girl back to her seat, then sat with her, talking of her work, her reading, her thoughts, a hundred things which cheered Marie, and made the time pass deliciously, until the hour for the poor girl to be wheeled out into the sunshine, as she was wheeled at Honor's wish every day, this change being an inexpressible treat to one who had so much of "lying still" in her life.

"You have been writing, I suppose, Marie ?" said Honor, pointing to an open desk, which had been a present from Lady Lawrence to the girl to whom she had often chosen, for purposes of her own, to give hard words.

"No, Miss Honor," said Marie, with one of her frequent attacks of shyness, "I have not been writing. I have only been looking at my photographs. I have but three, but those three I can never look at too often. You remember this, Miss Craven ?"

As she spoke she took from her desk a photograph Honor had seen one day in the little kitchen at East Cottage, and she laid it gently in Honor's outstretched hand.

"I have seen it," said Honor, hurriedly, and passed it back.

But in the next instant she had drawn her hand towards her again, and had bent her eyes gravely on the picture. There sat Royden on his own wide solitary hearth, with his

dogs about him, and a deep thoughtfulness within his eyes ; and as she looked, those words rushed back again, and filled her eyes with tears—

“Knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine must be.”

With a lingering gesture which was pitifully tender, she laid the photograph back in its place. Then she took up an inartistic portrait of Marie's father, and talked brightly and pleasantly of the little Frenchman, until Marie's heart was full of loving pride and pleasure, and until a servant came to summon her, and Honor nodded a bright good-bye.

Phœbe was not alone when Honor joined her after Marie's departure. Captain Trent had just been admitted, and was now, like Phœbe, watching the door for Honor's entrance. She welcomed him with all her old brightness, though not with her old raillery, and in a few minutes the cousins were chatting pleasantly together, though Phœbe's curious eyes were not satisfied with Honor's smile, nor did the ears of Captain Trent deceive him when he missed some ring of brightness in her tone. So thoroughly happy she made them in her presence, though—as she always could do—that they were only half convinced of their fancies.

The Duchess of Hartreigh, a pompous old lady, whose one strong effort through this season had been to forward her son's eager courtship of the girl-millionaire, called at luncheon time, and so Hervey stayed too, and they had quite a merry meal ; but nothing would persuade Honor to accept the duchess's urgent entreaty that she would take a seat in her carriage for the Park, where—after allowing due time for her shopping—the wily old lady knew that her son would be waiting to join them.

“But you will go with *us*, Honor?” pleaded Phœbe, when the ducal vehicle had rolled pompously away. “Our presence was your excuse, so it will be quite natural for you to go with us.”

“Quite natural,” assented Honor, tiredly ; “but I would rather—I do not care for that crowd in the Park to-day, Phœbe.”

Still, when she saw a cloud fall on Phœbe's face at this refusal, she changed her mind. It would give her cousin

real enjoyment, which it always did, and the chief pleasure which Honor's unselfish nature knew was that of rendering others happy. So, with a smile and kiss, she promised to go; and, as they drove round and round the well-worn track—Hervey, only one now of the many gentlemen who sought a footing for himself or his horse beside the splendid carriage—many an envious thought and glance were given her by hearts far lighter, and eyes that had never known such tears as Honor had shed that day.

"May I come in to-night?" asked Hervey, when he parted from them at the door. "I am under a promise to dine with my aunt and Theodora, but may I come to you afterwards?"

"No," smiled Honor, "you ought to stay with them. I suppose it is of no use my sending any message to Theo, she has quite cut off all old acquaintanceship with us?"

"Lucky thing for you," put in Captain Trent, briskly.

"So has Jane," continued Honor, not heeding his remark. "I have had such a very emphatic refusal of my last invitation to her."

"Another lucky thing for you. I shall come, Honor, please," he urged, with perseverance. "If the house is closed, I can but go back to my own quarters."

CHAPTER XXXII.

I will (he cried), so help me God! destroy
That villain Archimage (*the demon of indolence*).

THOMSON.

Honor and Phoebe were alone together when Captain Trent came in, after his visit to Mrs. and Miss Trent in Harley Street. The girls had spent a quiet evening at home, and though Phoebe had looked upon herself in the light of a voluntary martyr when she had insisted on staying at home, because Honor would, she found she was very thoroughly enjoying the novelty of an unengaged night.

She looked into Hervey's face when he entered, and in a

moment betrayed her surprise, for it was evident that he had been terribly excited.

Honor had looked up too when he entered, and saw the change in an instant ; but this change hardly seemed to surprise her. The traces of angry excitement improved him, and the restraint which he had evidently put upon himself gave a new strength to his features, and a glimpse of steady courage to his face.

"Are they well in Harley Street?" asked Honor, when, without his characteristic languor, he had taken a seat beside her.

"Yes, quite well—thank you, Honor."

The last words were uttered in his usual tone, but the first were sharply, almost viciously, spoken. Then he fell into a moody silence, while Honor wondered whether he wished to tell them what was vexing him, or whether he might think it an intrusion on his thoughts ; and while Phoebe sat quite still, and by the absence of her vague and gushing questions showed to him, more plainly than aught else could have shown it, the change which these last few months had wrought in her.

"I was afraid you would have engagements for to-night," he said, presently.

"Honor did not wish to go out," replied Phoebe, quietly, "so I would not."

Another proof of the change in her, and Hervey was not slow to appreciate it.

"I—have had a nice evening," he said, sarcastically, betraying at once not only his willingness to tell all they could wish to hear about himself, but even his anxiety to do so. "Honor, just think of my aunt seizing upon me directly I arrived, and hinting—very strongly *hinting*, if it could be called anything really short of plainly speaking out—that it was high time for me to arrange about my marriage! She supposed I never should be any richer—or a more desirable husband—than I am now, and so it was childish to wait any longer. Of course she had hoped that I should have been old Myddelton's heir! but that since"—

"Never mind," said Honor, quietly, when Hervey, straining the words upon his lips, rose excitedly and paced

to and fro in the room. "It would be better not to tell us at all, Hervey ; but certainly do not repeat what relates to me."

"How she dare say it !" fumed Hervey. "I—it was no wonder I lost command over myself, and told her a little—I'm sorry now to remember how little it was—of my opinion of her."

"Hush, Hervey—do not tell us that."

"I must," he cried ; "I must tell you, Honor, I must tell both of you, for the words seem bursting from me, and—and there are resolutions struggling behind, which I must utter aloud to you. No one ever helps me but you, Honor—do let me tell. Theo herself came in then, and—and I really do not quite know what she said. She supposed that we were to marry ; she had always supposed it ; and it was just as well it should be now—a marriage in the season was a little less of a bore than a marriage out of the season ; and as it had always seemed to be an arranged plan——Bah ! I can repeat no more of her cold, selfish, heartless words. Honor, there has never been one word of marriage uttered between us—never, on my honour as a gentleman ; and why should there be now, when the prospect of a future spent with Theodora would hang over me like a curse. I told her"——

"Hervey," pleaded Honor, gently, "I wish you would not tell us."

"I must," he answered, stopping to entreat her patience by a glance. "At least," he went on, modifying his words, when he saw how thoroughly she was in earnest, "I will not tell you all she said, for it is too contemptible even to be remembered ; but I must tell you that I did not utter one taunting remainder of her pursuit of Royden Keith, when she taunted me of——, taunted me, and stung me almost to madness."

"Sit down, Hervey," said Honor, gently, "and ring the bell, please. We will have one of the *petits soupers* you like so much."

"Oh, Honor," he panted, standing before her for a moment, "such a scene as that would have roused any man. To be expected to live all your life with a woman who cannot utter one kind word of those that are dearer to you

than life itself, and to find so suddenly that you are as much to blame as she! Oh, Honor, what a lazy, inert, selfish life I have led! How can I blame Theodora for taking my bondage for granted, when I made no effort to prove myself free? It all came back to me so wretchedly to-night; and, but for the lessons I have learnt in this dear home of yours, I should have been more unmanly than I have ever been. But your lessons and your help have not been all in vain, Honor; and, though I grew half maddened there, I did not speak a word that even *you* might not have heard; and though, in my anger, I declared I should tell you what they said of you, I have not done so—I would not have done so, even if you had not silenced me. As for what Theo said of Phœbe”——

“Does not your promise of silence hold good as regards Phœbe too?” inquired Honor, smiling, as she laid her hand on Phœbe’s.

“Yes. I told them I wished they could see how different she was from”——

“Come, Hervey, do ring. We are hungry. See how late it is; and Phœbe has been playing to me for hours.”

“Honor always pretends she likes me to play to her,” put in Phœbe, deprecatingly; “but of course she only pretends. Mine are all stupid pieces, and I play them generally wrong, too.”

“Phœbe,” said Hervey, pausing before her and speaking with a glimpse of simple, courageous earnestness, which showed him in the colours of true manliness at last, “neither you nor I can ever know why Honor is so good to us; for, in old times, I galled her with my shallow patronage, and you allowed her to deny herself perpetually for you. We—we can only gratefully accept her goodness, and try—as I will try harder than ever from to-night—to repay her in the way she likes best. ‘Don’t cry, Phœbe,’ he added, while the tears were very near his own eyes too; “don’t be offended with me for the thoughtless words I have said to-night. Let us be good friends always. May we?”

“Yes, yes,” cried Phœbe heartily, as she laid her plump little hand in Hervey’s proffered palm; “and you will not think of me according to what Theodora says, Hervey?”

“Never. I will think of you only according to my owl

judgment ; or, better still, according to what Honor says."

"You think of Honor," whispered Phœbe, softly, "as your good angel, Hervey."

"I do," he answered, thoughtfully ; "I have cause to do so when I recollect from what she saved me. I have tried to be different—I have, indeed—but from to-night I will try harder still. I will waste no more days in self-love and indolence—no more ! Will you take my hand, Honor, in registration of that vow ?"

Mutely Phœbe sat and waited. After Honor's ready hand-clasp and cheering words, would he seek hers too ?

Yes ; he came towards her in this new, quiet earnestness of his, and held his hand for hers.

"I think," said Phœbe, softly, "that you will not regret this scene with Theodora, Hervey."

Nor did he.

The dainty little supper was quite a cheerful meal, while still Honor's ears were, as they had been all day, keenly and painfully alive to every sound, and her eyes had a dreamy, waiting look, lying ever behind their warm, bright smile.

The cousins were standing together, about to separate, when the peal of the visitors' bell woke the silence of the house. Honor, unconscious what she did, started back with one quick, indrawn breath ; and both to Hervey and to Phœbe, then, was it plain that she had dreaded tidings of some kind. They saw her face grow deadly white, though the name announced was a friendly and familiar one—

"Sir Philip Somerson."

They saw her strive, as she went forward to meet him, to hide the anxiety which burned almost feverishly in her beautiful eyes. They saw that the Baronet met her very gravely and very pitifully ; and, seeing this, they knew that the tidings which he bore could not be happy ones.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

He prayeth best who loveth best
 All things both great and small ;
 For the great God loveth us,
 He made and loveth all.

COLERIDGE.

Two nights before this, Royden Keith, just as he had finished dressing for Honor Craven's ball, had been inquired for by a stranger.

"A woman, sir—and she will not give her message to me."

So Pierce had said, and Royden, without demur, had sent for her to his presence.

"I am come, sir," said the woman, giving her message a little hurriedly ; "from one who is dying, and who prays to see you first. She bade me give no name. I was only to say this—Would you give further help to the mother whose child you once saved ?"

"I remember," said Royden, without any hesitation. "I will come."

He did not give utterance to the surprise he felt at hearing that the woman who had seemed to shrink from him each time he saw her at Abbotsmoor, and had secretly eluded him at last, to escape to London, had yet sought him out, and sent for him in her last hour. He saw that this messenger was in total ignorance of all save her own errand ; and he saw, too, that she was anxious to return. So he threw a loose grey coat over his evening dress and followed her. She started on in front, as if she knew only the task of acting as guide, but he soon overtook her and called a cab.

"Please stop in St. Paul's Churchyard," she said to the cabman, in a quick, business-like voice ; and Royden wondered how it could be that the timid, country-bred woman from that cottage in the green lanes near Abbotsmoor could have voluntarily come to live in the very heart of the City.

"I told him to stop here," Royden's guide said, when they left the cab, and turned into Dean's Court, because the

wheels sound so noisy sometimes, however high up the rooms may be. This way, please, sir."

They walked for a few minutes along narrow thoroughfares, whose only radiance was their tavern windows, then stopped before a tall, gaunt house, whose lower windows were all dark.

Following the light his guide carried, Royden climbed the steep, bare stairs, flight after flight, until she stood before a closed door, and waited for him.

"This is the room, sir," she whispered; "I am not coming in, but I will be ready if you want me. I live a few doors lower down the street, but she and me" (pointing to the closed door) "made friends a bit, finding trouble had visited us both. I like to do all I can for her, just as I believe she would have done it for me; so I'll wait below, sir, and be ready if you call me. Margaret my name is—so is hers, and that drew us together a bit, too. It takes no stronger a tie than that, sometimes, to draw together two that, but for each other, might starve up here, and die without a friendly word or glance. *Margaret*, sir, don't forget."

She turned away without waiting for any answer, and Royden looked after her pitifully. Surely here a helping hand and heart were needed!

He quietly opened the door to which he had been guided, and found himself in a small room, neat and clean, but holding no occupant. Opposite him another door stood ajar, and when he had knocked upon that, a slow and heavy voice bade him come in.

In this room a woman lay upon a small bed, facing the open window, before which a candle burned steadily in the heavy city atmosphere of the June night. In a moment he recognised the face upon the pillows, though the cheeks were gaunt and hollow, and the eyes (beyond their old hunted look) had a feverish fire in their depths, as they rested fixedly upon a child who lay sleeping in a tiny bed beside her own.

"I am come," said Royden, in his kind and quiet tones; and he laid his fingers on the burning hand which rested heavily upon the coverlet.

The dying woman's eyes turned swiftly from the child, and fastened themselves upon the handsome, pitiful face

beside her. Royden drew a chair up to the bed, and sat there easily—just as if waiting were not wearisome to him.

“How is the boy?” he asked, pleasantly meeting the steady gaze.

“Well,” she answered, the word dropping slowly from her dry lips. “Well, but you saved him—only to be left—alone—at last.”

“Alone? Is there no one?”—

“No one,” she answered; the words were a terrible effort to her, as her eyes grew wider in their speechless questioning. “What can—I do?”

“Your kind neighbour,” suggested Royden, his thoughts wandering from the words he uttered.

“No,” she answered, moving her hand backwards and forwards in its heavy, restless weakness. “I have no neighbours. I—was afraid of them. You mean the one who fetched you. She is—poor—and sickly. It would be cruel.”

“Do not fear, then,” said Royden, very quietly. “Your boy shall be taken care of. I promise this.”

“He—he has a little money—a little—his father’s,” she said, a momentary feverish joy brightening her eyes, and fading again as suddenly. “I shall not leave him in poverty. But alone, and in this great world of”——

“He shall not be alone,” said Royden. “He shall have care and guidance while he is young, and help when he is older.”

She did not answer this, and he even fancied that the longing—terrible in its keen anxiety—of her feverish eyes, grew more and more intense now that his promise was given. Some anguished doubt was weighing on her eyes, as he saw; but how could he help to fathom it, unless he uttered words which should betray his own suspicion?

“The money is there,” she said, pointing to a worn bank-book which lay beside her on the bed. “Take it, and—dying—I know you will keep your—promise. Two years ago, when you saved him—I trusted you; I could not help it; but when you asked me”——

A sudden pause, for her voice failed, but in the long

silence that searching gaze grew inexpressibly painful in its mute questioning.

"Margaret," said Royden, bending above the troubled face, and speaking very low and kindly, "you have something to tell me which you ought to tell before you meet your Judge in Heaven."

A spasm of pain shot across the hot face, so rapid that in one second it had passed.

"I—cannot—" The words faltered and fell brokenly now through her stiff lips. "I cannot—nor dare—I meet—my Judge."

If it had not been for this unexpected message, Royden Keith would now have been participating in a scene of brilliancy and mirth most utterly opposed to this dying hour, and he would have been gay amongst the gay. But he had no thought now for that scene—no memory of it even. His post of duty lay before him here, and in that earnest, steadfast faith which belonged to him, he was able to brighten and cheer this dying bed, and gently lead the groping soul a little nearer to its God.

"It—is a mist," she said, raising one hand for a moment, as if she would cut through the space before her, while Royden whispered to her of Him who is always waiting to pardon and save; who not only standeth at the door in His great patience, but knocketh untiringly.

"I know He is there—I have known it for years, but I—I want to feel His hand, to see His face, and *something* is between us."

Again the words ended suddenly and shortly, in the raised, feverish tones, and the mute, eager question of the dying eyes spoke vaguely and miserably in the silence—a silence broken presently by Royden's voice, as, on his knees beside the bed, he pleaded with the Father for this troubled child. The woman's hard, quick breath was softened as she lay and listened.

"Oh! my dear Lord," she sobbed, when Royden's voice was hushed, "accept that prayer for me."

When he rose, he took a Bible which he saw lying open on a chair, and softly read to her the Saviour's precious words of pardon and of promise. And while he did so, the eyes which he could not see, lost somewhat of their

troubled fixity of gaze, and there struggled into them a gleam of hope.

"She read to me," the woman faltered, with a faint gesture towards the closed door, "but she read of other things. There was always—the great white Throne—always; and I could see Him there—a Judge, *my* Judge; and she read—it might be only once, but I heard it afterwards in every line—that all liars shall—have their part—ah! I forgot it all while *you* read. I—I saw Him—a Father—ready to pardon me—waiting to pardon me. I shall see—other things—clearly if—if you help me still."

And while the quiet hours of the June night stole on, Royden's own kind words, and those calm and wondrous words he read, *did* help her.

The candle had burnt down to its socket, and the faint summer dawn was creeping through the open window, when the neighbour who had fetched Royden entered with a cup of tea for the sick woman. Instinctively he made a movement then to leave the room, but suddenly all the wistful, troubled eagerness returned to the wide eyes upon the pillow.

"You go, Margaret," the dying woman cried, with an entreating gesture; let him stay. I—I have something to tell him."

Yet still, when left again with Royden, she lay in silence, and told nothing.

Then the hours crept on again, until the light fell straight from heaven upon the dying face to which no sleep had come; and to which no sleep could ever come again, until one last touch should close the troubled eyes for ever.

Just as Royden returned to the bedroom, after carrying away the smouldering candle, the little boy awoke; and, waking just as he had fallen asleep, with a vague sense of misery and loneliness upon him, he stretched out his hands to his mother, and sobbed as if his little frame could not contain its load of fear and grief. The mother, powerless in her weakness, saw Royden take the child tenderly within his arms, and heard the sobs grow faint and few at last upon his breast. Then her long watchful silence was broken sharply, a light broke across the fixed gaze, and with sudden feverish strength she rose in her bed.

"I want—a magistrate!" she cried, and clasped her burning hands. "It is all clear before me now. My child—it was for my child I feared—but he will not suffer. I read that in your face. Ah! God is good—so good—and it is not too late! Let me—see—a magistrate!"

"I will bring one," said Royden, gently putting the child out of his arms.

"No, no," she cried again, "not you, for it may be too late. Let her go. Call her; say 'Margaret,' and she will come. Let her go. She will understand, and she knows London. She will manage, as she managed to—to bring you."

Almost like one in a dream, Royden returned to the sick-room, after having despatched the neighbourly woman who waited to be useful. Was the end of his long search near at last?

"Will he be in time?" moaned the sick woman, when once more he took his place beside her, and the little boy crept up and climbed to lay his head upon his shoulder.

"I think so. He will soon be here."

"But I am dying fast, am I not?"

Not for the world would Royden have concealed the truth from one whose every breath might be her last, but he uttered it so kindly, and touched with such faith upon the happiness beyond, that a glance almost as peaceful as a smile shone in her eyes when they met his.

"Let me bid him good-bye."

Royden laid the child upon the bed, and turned away. That long, last parting between the mother and son was most sacred in his eyes.

"You have promised," she whispered, wistfully, when Royden came presently to take the child from the bed. "You have promised—to help him—that his life may be different from—his mother's. There is the book—it is but little—yet his father wished"—

"It shall be used wisely for him," Royden said, holding a cordial to her lips when her voice failed. "Rest in perfect peace. He shall never feel himself uncared for whilst I live."

And now a real smile lighted up the thin, worn face.

"Now—if he will only come—in time—that is all."

He came almost as she spoke—a light-hearted gentleman, who looked upon all magisterial duties as the comedies of life ; and yet the dying woman's solemn earnestness infected even him.

"I am much obliged to you for coming," she faltered, humbly. "I will not keep you long. I know what to do—my father told me. I"—moving her hand restlessly about the pillows—"have it here. Margaret, where are you ? I can scarcely see. You put it here, when I bid you bring it from my box—for me to burn—before I died. I meant to burn it. I left it to the last ; but I—meant to burn it—sealed as it is. I cannot now. He saved my only child—he helped me, and will help my boy. But for him I should have burnt it, and the truth could never have been known. Where is it?—where is it ? My strength is going."

Murmuring soothingly the while, the woman who had brought in the magistrate moved the pillows one by one, until she found a packet tied and sealed.

"There, there," cried the dying woman, trying to grasp it in her hot, weak fingers, and looking eagerly up into Royden's face ; "you will understand it. I do not forget how you questioned me of Gabriel Myddelton—the questions from which I fled. It is for you—let me leave it with you—but I have something to do first. Father told me of it. 'In the presence of a magistrate,' he said. Now I am ready."

Formally, with little need of help or direction, and clearly, in spite of her failing breath and feeble tone, she took the packet in her hands ; and tenderly touching the Bible which they gave her, she testified on oath to the truth of what the documents contained. Then, with a sigh which sounded almost happy, she gave the packet into Royden's hand, and turned away her face.

The sun was shining high above the city roofs before the last heavy breath was drawn. She had begged that the boy might not see his mother die, so the neighbour who had been so kind and anxious carried him away to her own room, and Royden was watching alone when the end came, for the doctor had left her, knowing he had no power to do anything further.

Just as Royden closed the dim, wide eyes, the woman who had called herself Margaret noiselessly entered the room.

"Gone!" she whispered sadly. "She did not need me at the last, then, but she needs me now. They are not kind to her downstairs—they never were. They shall not come near her now."

"Then can you, and will you, wait?" asked Royden anxiously.

"I will be with her," she said, quietly, touching the white, dead face. "She was always solitary, but she would sometimes like me with her for a little even then. I would not like her to be left alone at all now, and yet, when I have finished here, I must go back to my own room, to leave the little boy safe, and do one or two things more."

"I see," said Royden, as he left the inner room; "then I will wait for your return."

He wrote a few directions to leave with his card; after which he saw the mistress of the house, and took upon himself the responsibility of all expenses consequent on the death of the poor solitary woman, and the temporary care of her boy. Then, when he was left alone, knowing he had done all he could do, and that his feelings, whatever they might be on opening the papers given him, could not interfere with this duty he had taken upon himself, he sat down in the outer room, and broke the seal and cut the string of the packet left with him.

It contained two separate papers, and though the handwriting on both was the same, the signatures were different. One was unintelligible; the other, written evidently by the hand which penned both papers, was—
"MARGARET TERRIT."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It is great sin to swear unto a sin,
But greater sin to keep a sinful oath.

SHAKESPEARE.

ONE o'clock ! The bell of St. Paul's clanged out the note like the opening chord of a great military band, and, in the quavering key of an old man's querulous negative, a Dutch clock upon the stairs of the lodging-house answered the single note. There were more footsteps below than there had been through the morning, for clerks were hurrying to their mid-day meal, and, now and then, a porter hastened past with a solitary chop upon a tray—for a few of the masters in those grim offices did not leave their posts until the office doors were locked at five o'clock, and they came forth to dissolve in the great misty crowd, and lose all identity until, casting anchor for the night in their several suburban retreats, they assumed an especial individuality in a moment.

Country visitors were strolling to and fro in the cathedral, silent and open-eyed, but wearing, withal, the encumbered and *distract* expression peculiar to sight-seers who follow conscientiously the beaten track. In the shadow of the great dome, that inexhaustive process of shopping was pursued indefatigably, its linked sweetness drawn out to its longest capacity. The confectioners were briskly aware that the business of the day had begun in earnest for them now, while wistful eyes feasted through the glass upon unattainable luxuries.

But, like its shining herald, the day is earlier in the east than in the west, and even then the guests who danced, and laughed, and jested at Honor Craven's ball last night, had not all risen, though the whirl of carriages had begun, and the critical crowd at Burlington House was already leavened with its dainty sprinkling of uncritical beauty and fashion.

Not a few among this crowd looked anxiously for a friend they missed last night ; not a few were (later on that day) to look in vain among the faces and figures in the park, for one whose absence was as disappointing as it was inex-

plicable. Guesses were hazarded, varied and wide apart enough, yet none fell near the truth ; for who could guess that one of the idols of this London season, watched for, waited for, longed for, sat in an attic in this city thoroughfare, deaf to all sounds, and blind to all sights around him, his grave eyes following, with a terrible earnestness, the badly-written words upon the paper, and his left hand lying upon the unread one, while his mind grasped promptly, word for word, the one to which was affixed the man's uncertain signature. And these were the words it bore—

“I, the undersigned, Benjamin Territ, miner, living in Abbotsmoor, and being dangerously ill, yet, nevertheless, possessing all my intellectual faculties, and finding that I am soon about to appear before the judgment seat of God, wish to appease the remorse of my conscience, and to do an act of justice, by retracting all I said upon oath against Gabriel Myddelton, in my deposition made at Kinbury, as to his being the murderer of his uncle, Squire Gabriel Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor. I declare before God that that deposition was not true, and that I retract it with all my soul, before God and before justice, and implore the Sovereign Judge, in His mercy, to accept this retraction as being the whole truth.

“This, as well as the following confession, is written by another hand, on account of my inability to write, from accidents received in the mine ; but it is signed by me in my cottage at Abbotsmoor, on this fifth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four.

“On the seventh day of March, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, young Mr. Gabriel Myddelton told me of the quarrel he had had with his uncle, and how his uncle had made a will which had disinherited him. He often came to my cottage, partly because he could never bear solitude, and my company was as pleasant, perhaps, as that of any of the farmers or cottagers upon the dismal estate ; and partly because I encouraged him, hoping that I could turn to account the interest he took in my daughter Margaret. She was a handsome girl, far above other girls on the estate, and to the manor there never came a young girl-face at all. If Gabriel Myddelton would marry Margaret, I thought, I would even promise to leave the

neighbourhood, for I knew the young squire (easy-going as he might be) would not care to acknowledge a miner as his father-in-law. I should be free to go to what world I chose, and I would take care that Margaret's husband provided me with the money I should need. And if I grew tired of that life abroad, I could still come back and have a farm here ; for I knew young Gabriel Myddelton could be easily intimidated.

"But on that day I speak of, he brought an appalling tale. He had quarrelled with his uncle, had been disinherited, and had left Abbotsmoor for ever. He told all this, more to Margaret than to myself ; and the girl sat beside the window where he stood, and looked as if something had turned her to stone. But I sat behind, and ate my supper slowly, and did not put in a word. But for all that, when I got up from the table, I had made my resolution ; and it was not my way—it never has been—to go away from any resolution I may have made, whatever stood in the way.

"They were early people at Abbotsmoor, and I knew that by ten o'clock the house was always silent and darkened for the night. I knew the low window of the old squire's business-room—the corner window opening on the bit of level lawn between the shrubbery and the house—and that window I easily opened with my own tools. I remember that I rather enjoyed the work, for I had not much cause to do anything but hate old Squire Myddelton, and I did hate him heartily. I doubt if there was a man, woman, or child on his estate who did anything else ; for what had he ever been to us to make us feel otherwise towards him ?

"I had but little trouble in forcing my entrance into the room ; very little even in opening the secretary where the will lay ; but just at the moment when I grasped the packet, and turned to effect my escape from the house, the inner door of the room was opened, and there was the squire, advancing towards me with a candle in his hand. I acted on my first impulse—what else could I do in the surprise of the moment ? I acted on my first impulse, as I have done all through my life. I dashed the candle from his hand, and then—in the dense darkness, when I felt he could not recognize me—I struck him one deadly blow from

my hammer ; and, knowing it would do its work on the weak grey head, I left him there upon the floor, and escaped from the window, with the will in my possession. I fled across the lawn, but in the shrubbery beyond I paused a moment to secure the parchment on my person. Then came an instant's horrible shock ; the old man, whom I had left for dead, had pursued me ! He came up to me running, and I could see the crimson streaks upon his face, and the thirst for vengeance in his failing eyes—a fearless old man in all his meanness. I stood a moment facing him, then, with one well-aimed blow, laid him dead upon the grass, and there was no stain of blood upon my hands or clothes.

“ I left him lying there, of course, and, hurrying through the wood, reached my own cottage an hour afterwards, from quite an opposite direction.

“ Gabriel Myddelton could better tell the rest, as his counsel told it for him at his trial, when my words and Margaret's, and the facts which others added, made the tale of no avail. He had returned from Kinbury that night, to ask his uncle's pardon. He had taken his way through the wood, intending to gain admission to the squire's room through the very window I had opened, that the servants might not know of his return at all, if his uncle did not forgive him. In the wood he had found his uncle lying, and, astonished and alarmed at what he thought must be a sudden illness, he had raised the old man's head in his arms. What he saw I need not tell, though I am dictating this confession as fully as possible, for a relief to my burdened conscience.

“ A horrible fear seized young Gabriel Myddelton that the suspicion of this foul deed would fall upon himself. He saw even then the chain of evidence against him which really brought him at last to the cell of a doomed criminal.

“ Timid as he was by nature, there was but one course he could decide upon. He fled from that spot in the wood as if his uncle's fate awaited him there ; and he never stopped in his flight until he reached my cottage, and found protection and help—as he fancied. He washed the blood from his hands, burned his stained wrist-bands, and changed

the coat on which the old man's head had fallen and left its traces.

"Margaret told all this at the trial, and I stood by, and knew the words would hang him. But he himself had another explanation of the tale to give, and now I swear that *his* was the truth ; and ours, though in many respects true to the letter, held a lie in every word.

"I helped him that night, simply that I might know where he lurked ; for, from the first, I had determined that suspicion must rest upon him. All my old plans were frustrated by this unnecessary and inconvenient murder, and personal safety now was my one motive in every action. In my first fear, I had begun to destroy the will, but I now thought of a fiendishly skilful plan. The fragments of the will which disinherited him should be found in his possession, and he should be overtaken in his endeavour to escape. This, with what my daughter and I could tell, would fix the crime upon him ; and not for a moment did the betrayal of his confidence weigh with me beside my terror lest my own guilt should be discovered.

"The rest all followed as I had planned and foreseen. What I have told is known only to myself and my daughter, and I have heard her solemn oath that she will add her confession to mine. After I had sworn to Gabriel Myddelton's guilt—yes, from the very first—I grew a changed and miserable man ; and this excruciating daily death which I have suffered since the clay fell upon me in the mine, is, I know, but a just punishment for my crime.

"Now—solemnly, as if in the presence of my God—I swear that this is truth, and confirmed, upon oath, in the presence of my daughter Margaret, in whose hands I leave it.

" (Signed)

BENJAMIN TERRIT."

Royden raised his head, and for a minute or two looked dreamily around the room. The door of the chamber of the dead was locked, as he had locked it. The sounds in the street below were but faint and far-off. Without a change in the intense gravity of his eyes, he leaned forward again in the silence, and read the second paper.

"Possibly these words will never be read by any eyes save

my own, for I only write them because my father extorted an oath from me that I should do so, and leave them to be made public after my death. With whom can I leave them? Gabriel Myddelton, even if he is still alive, is too far away to be either hurt or helped by this confession—even if it were made public to-morrow. I am young and strong, and may wait years for death to visit me. And when it does, who will be near me to bear this release to Gabriel Myddelton?

“But I have promised it shall be written, and I will keep the oath my father made me swear, as I kept that other oath he wrung from me three years ago. The task of writing his confession has been hard and sore, but to write my own will be far harder. My father looks upon his bodily suffering as his punishment; but no punishment which could be given me on earth could relieve me from the load of guilt which has been secretly and slowly killing me since I met that one glance of Gabriel Myddelton's, whilst the judge pronounced upon him the sentence of death. My father almost seems to feel that he is pardoned for his share in this vile deed; I wish I dared to hope that when I stand upon that awful threshold of the door of death, I might feel that I, too, am pardoned. The weight of guilt has borne me down and isolated me among my fellow-creatures, and it will weigh me down and isolate me to the end.

“I have very little to add to my father's confession. What I told at the trial about Mr. Myddelton's assuming a disguise at our cottage was true in every particular. What I did *not* tell, was his confession to us, so honestly given, and which my father has related. He threw himself upon our mercy, and we betrayed him, and swore away his life. That thought stings me, even now, with a pain worse than death!

“It was an unnatural and unencouraged thought of mine, but I should have said, up to the day of that trial, that I would have laid down my life for Gabriel Myddelton. Then I proved its falseness by laying his life waste instead; and my fear of my father's threats and anger, and my submission to his command of obedience, are no excuse for me.

“I heard the sentence of death passed upon him. Through three heavy days and wakeful nights I pictured him within

those walls, a convicted felon, and I thought my life had burned itself out in the passion of that anguish, and that my doom was sealed as certainly as his.

"I had a lover then who was warder in the Kinbury jail, and though I had never listened to him before, I listened now, for one plan and resolution had filled my mind. If he would save Gabriel Myddelton's life—so I told him—I would be his wife when he chose. Ah! surely that was the least I could do for the man whose name we had blighted, and whose life we had lied away.

"We helped each other, and until the last moment came, no other thought was allowed to either of us. It was no new thing to me to lie awake at night and think of Gabriel Myddelton, but it was new to him, and I saw the change telling upon him, though I was proud to feel that no sense of either fear or honour would turn him from my will.

"The day and the hour came at last, and though my face was white as death that morning when I rose, I felt more nearly happy than I had felt since that night when Gabriel Myddelton's confidence in us had been so vilely abused.

"My husband—he was my husband on the following day—hired for me a large, low dog-cart, closed at the back, and a fleet but very quiet-looking pony. In this cart I drove myself alone into Kinbury, and, calling a boy who stood in the yard of the jail (a boy brought there by my husband for this especial purpose, though he looked to be only idling there), gave the pony into his charge. He stood steadily at its head, his back to the door and to the vehicle, and I passed in with the order my husband had obtained for me, and was admitted by himself into the condemned cell. What could be feared from me, when it was so well known that I had done most of all to bring the criminal to that cell?

"I wore two shawls and two dresses exactly the same, one concealed below the other; and under my skirt I had secreted a bonnet, veil, and gloves, precisely the same as those I wore myself.

"My husband had been for days cleverly acting his part, and his fellow-officials now knew him to be thoroughly imbued with a disgust for old Myddelton's convicted murderer, and a demonstratively staunch belief in the justice of

his sentence. So it was that no breath of suspicion attached to either of us, and permission was readily granted me to see Gabriel Myddelton, on the plea that I had lived near him all my life, and we had been children together.

"By skilful means, my husband attracted the turnkeys as far as possible from the passage to the cell, though of course they stayed where they could see me walk back to the dog-cart. I passed out, and then passed back again to the cell.

"Forgotten something," muttered my husband, turning carelessly away, "but at any rate I'm glad she is going. Poor lass! How bitterly she cries! Well, he was lord of the manor, you see, on which she has lived all her life.

"It was as I *seemed* to pass weeping from the cell, that my husband, by a great effort, kept the attention of the men engrossed by describing and illustrating very elaborately the breaking of the window through which the murderer had passed into Abbotsmoor. Then, after a few minutes, a sudden recollection struck him, and he turned sharply round.

"Of course you are watching," he said suspiciously, to one of the men.

"Of course," was the answer, though the man's eyes could not have done double duty. "I've seen her pass backwards and forwards two or three times, but she is back in the cell now, and you had better go, for her time is up."

"They watched my husband pass into the cell, and then led me out, crying still. They watched him help me to my seat in the dog-cart, and give me the reins, and asked if I feared to go alone. They all spoke kindly to me, and stood to watch me drive away—alone—as I had come.

"And so the tale was told next day, by others who had seen me. I had driven away *alone*, as I had come. How were they to know that Gabriel Myddelton, dressed exactly as I had been, lay in the back of the low, old-fashioned vehicle? That in that going to and fro, between the dog-cart and the cell, there had been one time when my husband's energies were put to their severest test while a female figure (weeping bitterly) had passed out and slipped into that waiting cavity. It was just one minute afterwards that my husband fetched me, and helped me to my seat.

"I had a fresh disguise in the dog cart, and in that Gabriel

Myddelton parted from me, when I had driven him as far as I dared to venture on the high road to Liverpool.

"Not until late at night was the prisoner missed, and then he was safe. My husband knew a man in Liverpool, who earned his livelihood by helping those who strove to get abroad in secret, and he had been prepared and bribed. So we heard from him of Gabriel Myddelton's departure for America. Since then no tidings have ever reached me, and now I know that they never will. I feel that after my death it will be too late for this confession to benefit any one, yet I dare not make it known before.

"This is the declaration which I have sworn to make, and to enclose with that which my father has dictated to me in this his mortal illness, and which he has charged me to make public when I feel my own death drawing near. I must, he says, confirm its truth upon oath, and leave it with a trusty person.

"My husband is dead, my father dying, my little one seems following them. What trusty person can be near me at the end? So I have a feeling that some day I shall destroy these papers with my own hand. But I have written the whole truth, as my Father in Heaven is my witness, and this is my signature.

"MARGARET TERRIT.

"Signed this fifth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four."

CHAPTER XXXV.

If he has friends that love him,
'Twill set them weeping all.

The Nibelungen-Lied.

For a few minutes after Royden had finished reading, he sat like one in a dream; then he slowly rose, and folding the two papers, placed them carefully in the breast-pocket of the coat which he had worn all night over his evening dress.

Then buttoning it, to guard as safely as he could the precious documents, he went softly into the further room, and, looking down for the last time upon the dead face, gave one backward glance along the marred life whose secrets had now been disclosed to him.

A step in the outer room aroused him ; gently laying the sheet back over the worn, calm face, he went out to meet the woman who was now at liberty to take his place. A few minutes they talked there ; and Royden waited, as if his time were of little value. But when all had been said, and he had left the gloomy house, he glanced up at the dial on St. Paul's, and hailed a passing hansom, as if his life depended upon speed.

"To the Great Western Station," he said, in his quick, clear tones. "A sovereign if you do it within fifteen minutes."

Out of the hubbub of the City, the man took the quiet, unfrequented streets ; the horse sped on with its inevitably unsteady perseverance, and Royden was in time for the 2.40 train to Langham Junction.

All through the journey, he sat quite still in his corner of the carriage, his thoughts intensely busy, while his heart was full of gratitude and rejoicing.

"To see her face when I show her these !" he murmured to himself ; "to think of the truth lying here at last in my hand !"

So he was thinking—picturing the brightening of one pale face at the tidings which he bore—when the train stopped at Langham Junction, and he stepped hastily down upon the platform.

"Where for, sir ?"

"On to Westleigh by the 6.30."

Just in his cool, natural tones, Royden answered the question ; yet, as he did so, he glanced across to where the Westleigh trains were wont to start, with an intense anxiety.

"The Westleigh train left half an hour ago, sir !"

Half an hour ago !—and that was the last ! No later train stopped at the little road-side station, for which at any time so few passengers were booked, save those for Westleigh Towers. Royden Keith stood in hesitation just

for two or three seconds. The road from this station to Westleigh was a long twenty miles, and the station—built only for the junction of the lines—was so far from the town, that he would not be able to get a conveyance of any kind. True, it was possible to reach The Towers more readily by taking a bridle-path, which he had daringly taken once before, even though for several miles it ran between the sea and the cliffs, and was covered at high water. But then to walk this distance was impossible, with the tide upon the flow ; and he had no horse here.

Yet, how he had dreamed of Alice's glad reception of him, and her untold gratitude and joy at the tidings he bore, the tidings he had sought so long, and, having found at last, had hastened to bring to her himself. Must he give up even now, when he had come so far, and seemed so near her ? No ; not even in such a case as this could Royden turn back from his earnest purpose.

"There is a farm," he said to himself, as he stood recalling an old house lying a mile or so along the cliff way, "where I can get a horse. On the high road I may have to walk ten miles before I can obtain one. I will manage it, if it is within man's power.

It was within this man's power ; and, an hour after the London train had passed on its way northward, Royden rode from the old farm where he had promptly bought a horse, which its master had never hoped to sell so profitably. The animal was young and strong, and fresh from its stable ; and Royden had mounted with a pleasant sense of its power and will to carry him fleetly along the dangerous shore.

The master of the farm, as well as his old father, urged Mr. Keith not to attempt the ride. The tide was treacherous, they said, and the distance across the bay much greater than it seemed. But Royden, shaking the men by the hand in his quiet, cordial way, told them he had no fear, only a great anxiety to get to Westleigh Towers that night, and much confidence in his new horse.

"I know the way well," he added, in his pleasant, earnest voice, "and it is a grand June evening."

The two men stood watching him from the farm gate. He understood a good horse when he saw one, there was no

doubt about that, and they guessed at once that he must be Mr. Keith. He was just what they had fancied the Squire of Westleigh Towers.

"But," said the elder man, as they turned away after watching Royden out of sight, "it is a dangerous feat he tries to-night."

Royden knew this well. It was not in ignorance that he started on that ride. But the horse he had bought was fresh and fleet, and the flood-tide two hours distant yet. Sitting straight and firm in his saddle, his fingers tight upon the rein, Royden galloped along the narrow and uneven path, while the passengers he met looked after horse and rider wonderingly.

On and on, while the sun slowly neared the water. On and on, until it set, and Royden breathed a sigh of relief, for the path had reached the shore at last. He paused one moment, and gave a look around him—first over the fading sea; then up the dark, precipitous cliffs; then higher still, beyond the fading sunset streaks. When that moment's pause was over, leaning forward in his saddle, he pressed his knees against his horse's flanks, and dashed along that treacherous road beside the sea.

Once or twice the young horse faltered in his pace, and once or twice he slipped, and would have fallen but for the strong, restraining hand upon the rein; but still he made his way bravely under the frowning rocks.

"On, good fellow, on!"

Now with caresses, now with strokes, did Royden urge him, while the tide rose and rose. That bay was reached at last of whose danger, at the flowing of the tide, he had told Lady Somerson and Honor, as they stood at that window looking down upon the spot. Ah, it was so near home! It almost felt like having reached home, to have reached this well-known spot, on which the windows of The Towers looked. But it was two miles across the bay, and the tide was rising, and a mist gliding northward from the sea, and slowly shrouding horse and rider in its chilling, darkening embrace.

But for an instant, just before it reached them, Royden strained his eyes to see the further limits of the bay, and—ah! yes, the waters lay seething there, falling back a little,

and glistening for a moment, then darkly lifting themselves in their power, and swaying broad and deep across the only way which lay before this solitary horseman.

Royden's hand fell gently on the horse's foaming neck, and for a moment his eyes fell too, resting from that gaze which had pierced the gathering darkness.

"There is no passage before us. If we can find no possible way inland, this hour means death for you and me—poor fellow!"

Urging him on, now by cheering words, and now by sharp, swift cuts, Royden rode to and fro within the arms of the bay, searching among the rocks for a possible way of egress; but the cliffs rose precipitous from the beach, and Royden saw that any hope of passing them was vain, while the sound of the waters, nearing the horse's hurrying feet, grew literally deafening in its horrible portent.

Brave and strenuous efforts did the young horse make, as Royden led him backwards and forwards, in this vain and futile search; but the pace grew slower—into a walk at last, while the tide rose and rose. So swiftly the waters rushed in at last, sweeping over that wide crescent, hidden in the mist, that in one second, as it seemed, horse and rider stood surrounded in the flood-tide.

Then the frightened animal started wildly on his own career, galloping backwards and forwards, to left and right, without aid or motive; racing to and fro in the very madness of his panic, as he tried to escape the grasp of the hungry waters; racing to and fro until at last, quite suddenly, he stopped in his wild gallop, stood trembling for a moment, with his eyes wild and strained, while the waves broke under his raised head, then, with a cry that was almost human in its anguish, he threw his head back, and Royden knew that he alone lived in that rush of rising waters, and that his only chance of safety was to cling to his dead companion.

At first the effort to keep his seat engrossed all his energies, but gradually that tension relaxed, while now he held one hand upon the breast of his coat, guarding that lately-won paper in its grip. Dreamily, with a consciousness of utter helplessness which was almost a relief after his restless, feverish exertion, he floated on the surface of the

tide ; recalling brokenly, as one sometimes recalls a dream, how one man, years ago, carrying an infant in his arms, had been drowned within this bay ; languidly wondering over the exact spot, and morbidly trying to imagine the scene. Then there came into his mind—still softly and vaguely—the story of a wreck upon this coast, and, looking out to sea he tried to guess the spot where the ship had foundered, and wished that he could float far out to sea, and fall just there.

One minute he was piercing the misty darkness with his eyes, and calculating how long it might be possible for him to live, and in the next he bent his head against the beating spray, with a faint smile upon his lips, and dipping his hand into the water, laid it upon his burning brow and lips. But, through all, his fingers never once relaxed in their close clasp upon those papers he had borne so far in safety—so far !

Just before the dawn of the June morning a group of fishermen slowly passed along the silent, dewy park to the locked door of Westleigh Towers. They were men to whom this beautiful park had been lent as holiday ground ; they were men who had learned to love the master who had treated them as brothers, and not serfs ; and so no cheek was dry when they trod noiselessly under the whispering leaves, bearing him among them, still with his fingers tightly closed upon the paper he had borne so far.

Gently and regretfully these men disturbed the sleeping household, and, with hands that were delicate then, if they had never been so before, they laid him in one of his own beautiful rooms. And when a girlish figure crept in and stood beside him, appealing mutely and tearfully for tidings, they whispered, in hushed and broken tones, that, sailing past the bay as the tide went down, they had found him there upon his dead horse, benumbed and motionless, as he must have floated for three hours at least.

Benumbed and motionless ! These were the words the men chose, because they saw the fear and horror in the pale face they gazed upon. But Alice knew what they left unsaid, and when she bent above the prostrate form, seeking in vain for some faint sign of life, a cry of terrible despair escaped her parted lips.

White and still the brave face lay ; nerveless and powerless was the strong, tall form ; yet still the wet stiff fingers of the right hand held their firm grip upon that packet, safely borne through all.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Nothing can sympathize with Foscari.

BYRON.

THREE weeks had passed since Royden Keith rose from that long and death-like swoon, and, neglecting his sore need of rest, returned to London, only two days after he had been brought home unconscious. But the tasks which had taken him to town were all completed now, and he had come home to wait. For three weeks he had fought with his terrible suffering and weariness, when one day the slow afternoon train, passing through Westleigh, deposited at that sleepy little station two passengers, who had a more engrossed and business-like air than the generality of people who halted at that rural spot. They gave their tickets to the solitary porter without a glance towards him, and they walked from the station together without a glance beyond the few yards of dusty lane which lay before them. One was a man of middle age, broadly built and well-dressed, but having the air of one who did not too fully comprehend the aim he had in view, or the way in which that aim should be pursued. The other was a small and wiry person, with ginger-coloured hair and complexion, and he decidedly *did* possess the air of knowing whither he was bound, and on what mission he was bent.

"Is it far along this baking lane?" inquired the elder man, without glancing into his companion's face.

"Only a brisk ten minutes' walk," rejoined Mr. Slimp, rubbing his short hands together, as if in the enjoyment of a private joke ; "and if it took us ten hours, instead of minutes, the fatigue would be repaid us with interest."

"If it is not," replied Lawrence Haughton, "our walk

back cannot be too long, if that happens to be what you mean."

Bickerton Slimp smiled affably. Perhaps this was to be considered as a smart repartee of his employer's.

"This preliminary stroke will be over in a couple of hours now," he observed, adopting an impressive decision in his sharp, weak tones.

No reply from the lawyer, and the clerk continued, with a still more evident assumption of assurance—

"The fact is the man has not a leg to stand on."

"I don't know," put in Mr. Haughton, with gloomy stiffness; "I would not, even now, take too much for granted; and if this last move does not answer"—

"Not answer!" exclaimed Bickerton Slimp, coming to a dead halt in his walk, "how can it help answering? What can prevent its answering now? And the sum he will give us to keep silence will set us going again more prosperously than ever; after that I'll engage that the firm shall become the richest and the sharpest in the county."

"If he does not offer us this bribe," said Lawrence, with no appearance of being carried away by Mr. Slimp's enthusiastic anticipations, "the practice—and something else with it too—cannot be saved, as you know."

"Of course I know," assented Bickerton, with a chuckle, "but there happens to be very little substance in that 'but.' You seem unusually and rather uncharacteristically timid to-day, sir; an unfortunate mood to have happened to fall into just now, when we want all our sharpest wits about us. Mr. Keith is no idiot, and even with truth and justice on our side, we must look sharp to intimidate him."

The two men walked on in silence now, and to judge by the expression of one, the truth and justice which had ranged themselves on his side were not animating or encouraging companions.

"Here we are," cried Mr. Slimp at last, in an airy tone of stimulation; "this is our gate. Now, Mr. Haughton, don't you go and look down in the mouth, or our game will suffer, and our practice be nowhere. Depend upon me. I shall look you up, and when you are at a loss, you must just leave the little affair in my hands."

The insolent familiarity of the confidential clerk was by

no means tasteful to the stern and concentrated nature of the master, yet some consciousness of the man's power over him kept all reproof from Lawrence Haughton's lips. So he walked up the park in silence, Mr. Slimp acting as guide, and showing a very suspicious knowledge of the place.

With an air of bustling complacency, he advanced to the great arched door of The Towers, and pulled the heavy iron bell which hung beside it, while Mr. Haughton followed, not by any means so thoroughly at his ease.

"Mr. Keith," demanded Bickerton, impressively, and the door was opened wide upon the visitors; but the man who ushered them in wondered a good deal what acquaintances of the master's would come in this curt manner, without prefacing the name, or expressing the wish to see him; and he confided this wonder to Mr. Pierce, by whom he passed on the message.

So the valet appeared alone at the door of the room in which the lawyer and his clerk waited.

His master was not well, he said, and would rather not be disturbed, unless his presence was very particularly desired.

Lawrence Haughton, seeing that the man had taken this course upon himself, answered, with angry sternness, that his master's presence *was* very particularly desired, and that as his own time was valuable, he should be glad to have his message delivered with promptness.

Pierce retired without further words, and Lawrence Haughton looked curiously around the beautiful room.

"Yes," he thought, with a feeling of self-gratulation almost equal to that in which Mr. Slimp was at that moment indulging, "yes, he can afford to pay well."

When at last Mr. Keith entered the room, the self-gratulation even of Mr. Bickerton Slimp was turned for a minute into another channel. This man, who had horse-whipped him on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, and who had often goaded him to the very verge of madness by his haughty, unassailable scorn and rather amused, but always evident, contempt, was ill, and had been ill. He came slowly and wearily into the room, and, leaning against the chimney-piece—not from habit, but in real need of the support—he turned to them a face which betrayed intense physical suffering.

There was much satisfaction to Mr. Slimp in that, for the consciousness had not yet forced itself upon him that the face betrayed just the old courage, and the strength which was so firmly built upon great patience.

Lawrence Haughton made an effort to plunge at once into his errand, but the course was too thoroughly at variance with his professional habits to allow him to do so. In his own way, therefore, the words curt and strong, the manner stiff and elaborate, he apprised Royden Keith, there upon his own hearth, that he, Mr. Lawrence Haughton, solicitor of Kinbury, possessed of all needful information in the case, was then on his way to inform his Government that Gabriel Myddelton, the criminal condemned eleven years ago to the gallows for the murder of his uncle, Mr. Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor, had been tracked, through all disguises and false pretences, by himself and his confidential clerk, and was then in custody of the police at Westleigh Towers.

"Here! Have you the police here?" inquired Royden, looking round him.

"They will be here in two hours' time, or less; at any rate, they will be here before we shall choose to leave," said the lawyer; adding, after a pause, as if the idea had just struck him,—“unless we are able to save you from this public degradation.”

He repeated the offer presently, more boldly and unmistakably, tacking to it an impressive reiteration of the threat. His courage was evidently equal to the occasion, and Mr. Slimp (his mind at ease now on that score) felt that he might stand aside and enjoy the scene. He had no fear for the success of their plan, for was not Gabriel Myddelton standing there in the utter silence of dejection, consequent on defeat? And was he not incapable of raising his eyes, either in surprise or contradiction?

"Have you nothing to say?" inquired Mr. Haughton, impatient now for his crowning success.

"Nothing," rejoined Royden, still without looking up.

"You understand my present plans?—at once to make public your crime and duplicity, in a quarter from which there can be no appeal."

"I understand."

"And," continued Lawrence, his voice raised more and more eagerly, "to have you taken into custody at once."

"I shall not attempt to turn you from your plan. I told you once before, if you recollect, that I was willing you should pursue it to the end, if you thought it prudent on your own part."

"Then, in little more than an hour's time you will be in custody," cried Lawrence, unable to hide his gathering passion of disappointment; "and, by this time to-morrow, your identity with the condemned murderer (who was, only by a woman's craft, saved from hanging) will be a household word all over England—in every home in which, under the cunning mask of your wealth and your new name, you have obtained a footing. But," continued Lawrence, with the crafty assumption of friendliness which sat so ill upon him, "I am willing to listen, if it strikes you that this fatal publicity could be in any way avoided"—He hesitated, trusting that the conclusion of the speech might be anticipated for him; but he waited in vain. "If not," he exclaimed, savagely, "I shall let the law take its course. If not," he repeated, emphatically, as if to oblige a reply.

"Is it by your wish, Mr. Haughton," inquired Royden, with a brief glance towards the fidgetty figure of Mr. Bickerton Slimp, "that your clerk is present at this interview?"

"I have assisted and advised Mr. Haughton throughout," struck in the embryo partner in the future firm, with a rather abortive attempt at easy self-possession, "and I wish to see him through it."

"You shall have that pleasure, then, with my hearty consent. I only desired Mr. Haughton to understand that it is not by my wish that you are made cognizant of the private affairs of his own family. You have, as I am fully aware, been for a long time engaged, both for him and with him, in this search, and I am quite willing that you should be present at its conclusion; after that, I shall thank you to leave this house at once, and to bear in mind that, if you attempt a second ingress, I shall have you dismissed—by the shoulders."

A pause then, and Lawrence, in a sudden access of impa-

tience, reiterated his old threat, again insinuating the one chance, from his own generosity and compassion, which remained for his victim.

Royden broke the ominous pause which followed, speaking in quiet, weary scorn.

"You intend, you say, to make public your conviction that you have discovered Gabriel Myddelton, the murderer of the Squire of Abbotsmoor? Let me save you from the unpleasant ridicule which you would incur by so doing. I have read the document which proves that young Gabriel Myddelton was innocent of the crime for which, eleven years ago, he was tried and condemned."

"The—the—devil!" panted Lawrence Haughton, in uncurbed passion. "What do you mean?"

"I have seen and read," repeated Royden, calmly, "the confession of the real murderer—one Benjamin Territ, miner, of Abbotsmoor—confirmed by affidavit, that the document is true upon oath."

"Where is the forgery?" cried Lawrence, his face convulsed with wrath. "Where is this perjured scoundrel and his lying document?"

"The document," returned Royden, too weary or too ill to be roused to either passion or amusement, "with a complete history of the case—*verbatim et literatim*—drawn up by a famous solicitor, has been placed in the hands of the Government, together with a petition to the Home Secretary." Royden paused here, though only because his breath was short and hurried; but in that pause Lawrence Haughton felt the ground give way under his one spot of safety. "Before this time," continued Royden, glancing from the lawyer to his clerk, "the Home Secretary has communicated with the judge—I felt that to be necessary, because judgment had been formally recorded against Gabriel Myddelton on evidence and the decision of a jury—which judgment is now, of course, respited—I hope you follow me—and Gabriel Myddelton's innocence is established, legally and technically."

"These papers," shouted Lawrence, his passion entirely overmastering him, "are foul and lying forgeries!"

"On the contrary," put in Royden, his quiet tones broken a little by evident suffering, "these papers, which prove

the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton, have been endorsed by the Home Secretary, and now lie at the Home Office, at your call, Mr. Haughton, or at the call of anyone who desires to witness the issue of this long-contested matter."

A pause again, while Mr. Haughton and his clerk struggled with many varied and uncomfortable emotions, among which was pre-eminent a very natural wish that they were at that moment beyond the park gates of Westleigh Towers.

"I will look into this," cried the lawyer, presently; "I will soon lay bare this vile fraud."

"Thus, as I said," continued Royden, as if he had heard no interruption, "Gabriel Myddelton's innocence is legally established with his Government. As for his friends—if he has any—they must maintain what opinions they choose. But you understand that the papers are at their call, too. I have given you all particulars I choose to give. Now complete your long-cherished plan, if you think it well, Mr. Haughton."

"I am not easily hoodwinked," remarked Lawrence, suppressing his passion by an immense effort, as he moved towards the door, "and I will disclose this knavery."

Royden's eyes, with something of their old quizzical glance, were fixed upon the uncomfortable figure of the little clerk, and he did not seem to even hear Mr. Haughton's threat.

When his guests had left, he rose slowly from his leaning posture, a smile crossing his lips as he pictured the very comical position in which Mr. Haughton would have been placed if there had chanced to be a grain of truth in his assertion that the police would follow him.

In the meantime, without uttering one word to each other, the baffled lawyer and his clerk returned to Kinbury; after which Mr. Slimp was despatched to the Home Office, and Mr. Haughton went through his books for the twentieth time, reading on every page the one word—*ruin!*

Striving against his growing weariness, yet as composedly as if he had been alone all the afternoon, Royden went out to meet the carriage when he heard the sound of wheels. With a smile of greeting, he helped the two ladies to

alight, and the younger one stood at his side until they were alone.

"Oh, Roy," she whispered then, "you are not getting better, you are weaker and weaker every day, and I can see how dreadfully you suffer. It is all because you fought so hard against this illness just at first, when you felt you had so much to do; and this was as much for my sake as"—

He stopped her with a touch of his fingers upon her lips, and a pleasant smile of dissent, but by no words; and she went slowly up the stairs and told her sorrow, as she always did, to the old lady who awaited her.

"He is so kind," she sighed, losing suddenly the look of pleasure which had brightened her pale face a few minutes ago, and which would brighten it again when her thoughts should go back to her one engrossing memory of those papers now lying in a place of safety which she only vaguely knew as a depository for those precious deeds, "so thoughtful for every one, so full of helpful, generous projects; and yet there is this strange solitariness about him ever—a solitariness which it seems as if no one could ever pierce."

"Wait, Alice—wait and see, my dear."

For this doubting thought, though a sad one, was a familiar one with the elder lady, and one which she could only bear to muse upon in silence.

What was the one thing which he lacked in his noble, useful life? Could no one ever make *his* lot as bright as he ever strove to make the lot of others?

"But while I wait," sobbed Alice, "he is ill, and it may come too late."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

I know not how it is,
 But a foreboding presses on my heart
 At times, until I sicken. I have heard,
 And from men learned, that before the touch
 (The common, coarser touch) of good or ill,
 That oftentimes a subtler sense informs
 Some spirits of the approach of "things to be."

PROCTOR.

THREE weeks had passed since Sir Philip Somerson had brought Honor the tidings that Royden Keith had gone home to Westleigh Towers on the day after her ball, and was confined there by ill health. Sir Philip and Lady Somerson were now abroad, and Honor had heard nothing more. The time was drawing near for the closing of the mansion in Kensington, and the adjournment of its young mistress to Abbotsmoor. But who could foresee what lay between that day and this July afternoon, when Honor Craven, as she sat reading to Marie, was astonished by receiving the card of Mr. Bickerton Slimp, on which was penned a request to see her on most important private business.

She acceded to this request without hesitation, for, thoroughly as she disliked him, she could not forget that he belonged indirectly to her old home and her old life.

When she entered the library, where Mr. Slimp awaited her, she found him very much changed from the sleek and fawning little sycophant he had always shown himself to her. He stood humble and isolated in the centre of the room, his clothes worn and dusty, the one word "failure" stamped legibly upon his person and manner.

Honor sat down, and waited for him to speak. It was not long before he did so, though he was long in finishing what he had to say. Without any introduction, though with tiresome circumlocution, he informed Miss Craven that he had felt it his painful duty to come and lay before her a few particulars respecting the affairs of Mr. Haughton, as she was, unfortunately, one among many whom he had defrauded; and his (Mr. Slimp's) conscience would not

allow him to rest until he had striven to make up, in some measure, for faults in which he (as Mr. Haughton's clerk) had been indirectly—though most innocently—concerned.

It would appear that Mr. Slimp's conscience rather eagerly sought rest ; for, without a pause, he diverged from every point obtainable from this centre, and rang a hundred changes on the frauds his late employer had practised, not only upon her and upon the public, but (in a still greater and more inexcusable degree) upon his ex-clerk himself—guileless and unsuspecting.

Honor listened in silence—it was hardly worth while to interrupt him—and he went glibly on ; making himself plainly understood, though, in his splenetic excitement, he made use of one or two expressions which were as Greek to Honor.

Above all facts, this one was urged and resented most. Mr. Haughton had made a promise to his head-clerk that at this present date he would take him into partnership, and now he had backed out of the agreement ; and the mortified ex-clerk, having discovered that the practice of Haughton, Solicitor, could not stand, had determined to take a special revenge for the two-fold duplicity.

Mr. Haughton was now hiding from his creditors, and Mr. Slimp happened to know his present concealment, and was willing to betray it to Miss Craven—for a consideration. It was then, and not till then, that Honor allowed him to see a little of the scorn his words and conduct had merited ; but Bickerton was far too deeply bent upon his own aim to let this interrupt his flow of pleasant confidence.

"Even if you decline' to remunerate me for this useful information, Miss Craven," he said, insinuatingly, "I shall still tell you. He has done worse than that to spite me, and my turn has come now. He has done worse than this to hundreds of people. If it had been only me he had injured, I would have been silent, but it is hundreds more, and so my duty is to bring him to justice."

"I do not wish to hear any of this," said Honor, indifferently, as it seemed, "it has no effect upon me at all."

But still she sat quietly to listen, and Bickerton Slimp could not read the agonising effort it cost her to hear, and—above all—to discredit what he said of her old guardian.

"Even if I did not betray his hiding place," resumed Mr. Haughton's would-be partner, "it would soon be discovered, and he'd be hunted out. He isn't used to making himself scarce at a moment's notice, and taking different characters on different emergencies, as some are. There'll be plenty after him, too—mad as blood-hounds when they know what he's done. No, there's no doubt about his soon being taken, but I thought it right to warn you first, Miss Craven, because if you wish your old guardian let off, it will be easy work for you; and at the same time, if you think justice ought to be dealt him, you have only to say the word and make it worth my while. I always was willing to do anything for you"——

He pulled himself up in hot and sudden haste, for one glance from Honor had been more than sufficient to remind him on what dangerous ground he trod.

"No; there's no doubt he will soon be taken, Miss Craven, by one or other of the victims of his fraudulent schemes," he resumed, more placidly, "and they are many. I could not enumerate, if I tried, the deceits which he has practised. Many families, whose names even you could remember, Miss Craven, are involved in ruin by him, though they do not know it yet. He has embezzled money he had to invest, and taken people in by sham mortgages. He has again and again suppressed certain deeds, and effected the sale of property previously mortgaged. More than one poor dupe has let him have every pound she possessed; to invest or place on mortgage, and the deeds have represented nothing but forgeries. One poor widow thinks she has bought, through him, the house she lives in, while it really belongs to a wealthy builder in Kinbury, for Mr. Haughton suppressed one set of deeds and supplied another. He has overdrawn his banking account, and borrowed money which is due. No, there can be no help for him, although his credit in Kinbury and the neighbourhood is so good that the crash may not occur just yet; *may* not, I say, unless I take the matter in my own hands. My first move is to inform you, Miss Craven, that he is hiding now at the 'Anchorite,' in Thames Street, and if you have any wish yourself to be the one to bring him to justice"——

Honor rose, her cheeks and lips white with anger

"You forget to whom you are speaking," she said, her tones as quiet as usual, though her manner was unmistakable.

Mr. Slimp made an effort to regain the ground he had lost by this one too daring step. Cunningly, long ago, he had discovered both the one passion of his master's life and the indifference with which it had been treated by his ward ; and, judging by his own contemptible feelings, he had imagined that Honor might rejoice over an opportunity of repaying her old guardian for the persecution she had suffered at his hands. But this feeling could only last one minute, and he knew that it had been injurious to his cause. Still he could regain his ground, he fancied ; and it was an unctuous satisfaction to him to lengthen his confidence against his erstwhile master. There was, too, the novelty of truth in so many of these cheering disclosures of fraud and duplicity. But he hurried now over the information, as if he feared its being still more summarily cut short. He might well fear. Honor had heard the one thing she wished to hear, and now no heed was paid to any further word.

"That inn in Thames Street is a capital place to get abroad from, under foggy circumstances," Mr. Slimp resumed, with spirit ; "and we can manage, if you really wish me to undertake it."

"I will think of what you tell me," said Honor, quite coldly, though she was actually trembling in her fear of this man in his treachery ; "I will see you again."

The fear, so proudly battled with, took the form in Mr. Slimp's eyes of a new courage, and he gazed in servile admiration on the girl's beautiful, easy figure, now that she seemed to understand him at last.

"In the meantime pray fix upon your own price"—the word was uttered in the very refinement of scorn, and Honor's eyes swept over the narrow form of the little traitor before her—"for secrecy, and I will purchase it from you—if your terms suit me."

"To you, Miss Craven, a thousand pounds is scarcely worth speaking of ; therefore you would not, I hope, think a thousand pounds"—

"To effect my purpose," said Honor, quietly, while she raised her clear eyes fully to his crafty face, "one thousand

pounds would be too little. Make your own terms, and I will see you here, at this hour to-morrow."

An expression of immense self-satisfaction settled in Mr. Slimp's face. He could afford now to be confidential even on an almost extraneous subject.

"If poor Mr. Haughton's last move had not so signally failed him, Miss Craven," he began, in a tone for which she could have annihilated him where he stood, "the old and well-established name and business would have been saved, and his present difficulties never made public; but that last move *did* fail, and he himself had no power of getting out of his present scrape. He felt so very certain of the identity of Mr. Keith, of Westleigh Towers, with the man who murdered Squire Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor, eleven years ago, that, even with only the very slight and presumptive evidence which he was able to amass during almost two years of search and inquiry, he went in person to inform Mr. Keith that the whole proof was in his own hands, and that he would at once give him over to the law as the condemned and escaped criminal, Gabriel Myddelton, unless he chose to buy his immunity—you understand, Miss Craven? That move, as I said, most signally failed; for—a humiliating fact which we first learned in this interview—the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton is now legally established; and I myself saw the documents proving it. I came up to town on purpose, and read them all at the Home Office."

"His innocence!"

Honor had no idea that the two words had passed her lips, and after their utterance her silence was intense.

"And more than that," resumed Bickerton Slimp, with an air of jaunty encouragement, "I do not, and never did, believe in the identity of Gabriel Myddelton with Mr. Keith of Westleigh—who, by the way, seems dying rapidly. Of course I have helped—for my own purposes—in fastening the suspicion upon him, but I never saw our way clearly to a grain of tangible proof; and I always felt that if he had been the man whom, for eleven years, Lawyer Haughton had been trying to hunt down, he could never have had such doubts about him, or shown such hesitation and uncertainty in the case. *He* is not one to be delayed by scruples, and I always understood his one reason for not

capturing his man, and the solution of those days and weeks and months of doubt which he underwent. If he'd had cause to feel sure in his own mind, the capture would have been sharp work. As for me, I doubted all along if this could be Gabriel Myddelton, and now I'll take my oath it is not."

The words all entered Honor's ears with a clear and almost appalling distinctness, and her heart was wildly beating; yet she stood there utterly unmoved, until he departed with an impressive reiteration of his intention to be at her service next day at that hour.

But the silence and the stillness left her when he left her. She moved softly and restlessly about the great, silent room, repeating to herself those words which seemed to mean so much.

"Not guilty! Gabriel's innocence! Not Gabriel—not Gabriel! Dying! And Gabriel innocent!"

Gradually her brain grew confused, and she lost the sense of these reiterated words, while only that lately formed resolution of hers held sway. She must see Lawrence; she must see her old guardian to-night, for fear it might be too late.

Then there came over the girl a feeling of loneliness and dread most unusual to her. She listened and longed for the sound of Phoebe's return, while still she tried, with all her strength, to throw off this new and miserable foreboding, which had fallen upon her with such a terrible weight, and under which she could not even hope.

What was it? What had brought this crushing weight upon her? Was it fear for Lawrence, or—for whom? Had it fallen upon her when she heard of her guardian's crimes, or of Gabriel's innocence, or of that interview which one of Gabriel's cousins had had with the man on whom he laid so foul a charge?

She battled with the feeling, striving to dissect it, that, if possible, the action might dispel it.

"It could not be," she whispered to herself, "that a felon's fate should be my guardian's now, as it was —— It could not be," she moaned, strangling each thought as it forced its way to her lips, "that there should be a fatal ending to this illness of one who has been wrongly judged.

It cannot be! Oh! if Phœbe would but come, and speak to me of other things."

The house seemed so large and silent, and she so solitary, that when at last Captain Trent came into the library unannounced, she greeted him with an unfeigned gladness, which filled his heart with an exquisite delight as unexpected as it was delusive.

"Honor," he cried, his joy overmastering him, "are you really glad to see me—are you really?"

"So glad," she answered, speaking low in the gravity of her own engrossed thoughts. "Phœbe is away."

The last few words could not damp him, for her greeting had given him just the slight encouragement which was all he needed; and once more—more urgently than ever, but for the last time now—he poured out the old story of what he called his unconquerable and unchangeable love. He never guessed what pain he gave her, and she did not blame him by one thought; because she saw that, as deeply as it was possible for him to feel, he felt this.

Softly and kindly she answered him, as she had answered him often, but she saw how much more earnest he was now than he had ever been before, and she saw that only one thing which she could say could prevent this old scene being repeated. It would be well for Hervey. Once let him feel that this love of his was hopeless, and he would quietly submit, and live his new life still more earnestly; once feel that he must take this first love from his heart, and he would seek another love to take its place. No fear that Hervey's heart would break in solitary suffering.

And for herself? Well, it would be best for Hervey, and she could trust him now. She laid her right hand gently upon his, and looked up into his face with a glance so earnest and so true—so sorry for him and so sorry for herself—that he felt, instinctively, that whatever words she uttered would be uttered solemnly from her heart, and must be sacred between them for evermore.

"Hervey, I will tell you the truth to-night, while we are here alone together, and then I know you will never speak to me again as you have just done. It will save us both pain afterwards, for you will see how impossible it would be for me ever to give you a different answer from that

which I have just given. I have no power to give my love to you, or to anyone now, Hervey, for it was given long ago. We are cousins and old friends, are we not? And when I tell you this, I trust you with all my heart."

The great astonishment which filled his mind was plainly written in his face. Could this be possible? Honor, who had never seemed to care for anyone in particular, for whose love so many strove, and to win whom no trouble could be too great, no wooing too persistent! Honor to have given her love away long ago! Why, long ago must be in those old times in Statton, which, in Hervey's mind, had long been entirely disconnected with Honor's present life. How could it be, and to whom?

A sudden fear for her—which a minute ago would have appeared impossible, and a minute hence was to again appear impossible—made him look down questioningly and almost pityingly into her face. Ah, no, Honor could never have given her love unsought and unreturned. In all his sadness and despondency, he could almost have smiled at himself for the fear.

"Do not ask me," she said, reading the question in his eyes. "It is an old ache. Do not make me speak of it now, Hervey. You will forgive me any pain that I have caused you, because I bear a sorer still."

"Honor," he whispered, all the earnestness and manliness of his nature rising up to meet this trust of hers, "thank you for telling me this. As you knew it would, it has killed all hope within me; but perhaps it is better so."

"Yes," she answered, with another gentle touch upon his hand, as she dismissed the subject, "it is better so."

For a few minutes they stood in silence there—in the silence which only trusted friends can fall into—and then Phœbe returned from her drive, bright and excited. Yet though the three chatted pleasantly, and even jestingly together, Phœbe—little astute as she was—could detect an undertone of sadness in Honor's voice, and could read the new look of quiet hopelessness on Hervey's face.

"Oh, Honor!" she cried, repeating various items of news she had heard from the friends with whom she had been driving, "Mr. Keith is dreadfully ill at Westleigh; and, of

course, the girls say it is a punishment to him for having turned hermit suddenly in the middle of the season, and buried himself alive in his castle on the coast."

Phœbe's light voice ceased suddenly, and she left the room as soon as she could, murmuring unintelligible reasons for her absence.

Hervey had, quite by chance, been gazing at Honor while these words were uttered, and somehow—though he never afterwards could make it quite clear to himself how it had been—he read, in that moment, the one part of the secret which Honor had not told, and it made him very silent, until a question from Honor roused him.

"Hervey," she said, wistfully, "may I ask you to do something for me?"

"Anything—a hundred things!" he answered, eagerly, while still the heaviness was in his tone.

"I want," she said, raising her clear, grave eyes to his, and speaking very seriously, "to see my own cousin, Gabriel Myddelton."

"Gabriel Myddelton!"

Captain Trent could only echo the name in his surprise.

"Yes, Hervey; he is innocent, and has been wronged, and I long to tell him how sorry I am if I ever, even for a moment, felt he *might* be guilty."

"But, Honor, you do not know where he is."

"No," she answered, with deep thought; "but still I want this message borne for me. Will you undertake it, Hervey? I can trust you best."

"Dear Honor, of course I will; anywhere, to anyone; only tell me where, and to whom."

"To Mr. Keith, at Westleigh Towers."

"But, Honor"——

She stayed his words of quick surprise.

"You wonder," she said, quietly, "why I should send this message to him, and why I wish you to deliver it yourself. Will you wait for your answer, Hervey? Or am I asking too much?"

"Too much!" he cried. "Why, I would take it to the world's end for you, Honor!"

"Thank you, then that is all. Just say to Mr. Keith that I have a great longing to see my cousin—my own

consin—Gabriel Myddelton, and that I pray him to help me to do so. That," she repeated, slowly and thoughtfully, "is all."

He asked her no further question, and, when they separated, he whispered, with an earnestness which was totally unselfish—

"I shall start early to-morrow, Honor, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trusting me."

Honor had no need to invent an excuse for avoiding her engagements that night. Who, looking into her white face, could fail to see the pain she suffered? Still she pleaded so anxiously for Phoebe to go that Miss Owen consented, though with great unwillingness at first, and drove away in her radiance, leaving Honor standing at the hall window in the twilight, smiling a bright good-bye.

Half an hour after Phoebe had arrived at her destination, the large closed carriage stood again before the door at Kensington, this time waiting for the young mistress. She did not take her seat, as Phoebe had done, surrounded by a fairy pile of gossamer fabric; but she came from the house in a quiet morning dress, and taking her seat wearily upon the wide silk cushions, she gave the order, "The Anchorite, Thames Street," just as she would have given it to Buckingham Palace.

She had no room in her mind to-night for any thought of what her grave and powdered servants might surmise. Lawrence was not suspected yet, and she must see him before it was too late. That was all she allowed herself to think.

Yet this haunting dread, this subtle foreboding, which she had fought against so hard, held her still in its firm grip. And she gazed from the carriage window with a pitiful yearning for some sight or touch which should dispel this feeling, for she knew it to be the presage of some evil or some agony to come.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this, that, when the injury began on his part, the kindness should begin on ours.

TILLOTSON.

HONOR's carriage was being driven slowly up and down before the inn to which Mr. Slimp had unintentionally directed her, and she herself was making futile inquiries of an obsequious waiter, when Lawrence Haughton entered the house. He came in just as he used to enter his office, moodily and silently, but still with his head erect and his step heavily arrogant. There was no shabbiness in his attire, no slouching in his gait, no cringing in his bearing, as there had been in his ex-clerk's; but still, when Honor had followed him upstairs, and, after a quiet tap upon the door of his private sitting-room, had opened it before he had time to stay the entrance of any one, she could plainly see—ay, though the light was drearily dim—that he had a manner strangely at variance with his old, self-contained assurance.

If she had not been so wrapped up in her own earnest purpose, Honor would have been literally frightened by the effect her sudden appearance had upon him. The swarthy colour left his face, and beads of perspiration stood thickly on his brow.

"Honor!" he stammered, his voice hard and husky
"Honor—you?"

"Yes, Lawrence."

"You!" he repeated, as if the shock had deprived him of the power of further utterance, while his eyes clung to her face in almost terrible nervousness. "Here—alone?"

"Yes," she said again. "I, Lawrence, and alone, of course, because I came on purpose to see you."

He drew towards him one of the unlighted candles which stood upon the table, and taking a box of wax-lights from his pocket, struck one after another, all equally clumsily.

"No, please," said Honor, staying his hand with gentleness. "Don't you think there is light enough, Lawrence?"

He dropped the last match, and pushed the candlestick from him ; then he moved slowly, until he stood with his back against the window, his eyes still riveted upon Honor, who faced the fading light, beautiful in her gravity and earnestness.

"Why did you come?" he faltered at last. "Is there not humiliation enough in store for me? Of all the world, why did *you* come?"

"I have come," she answered, quietly, "to ask my old guardian to let me help him now."

He was fighting hard, as she could see, with the feelings which mastered him ; the consciousness of his plans being baffled, his love lost, his ambition wrecked ; and in her pity she strove to forget everything save her old regard for him, and her best memory of his care and guardianship. Looking almost as she used to look in those old days, and speaking to him almost as if he were her guardian still, she told him—without reverting to any particular crisis in his affairs—what she wished to do for him.

Kindly and anxiously she spoke, and as he listened, the faint, wild hope of her affection which had existed in his mind even to this hour, died a sudden and a hopeless death. In her pure warm pity, and in memory of those old times when his home had been hers, she wished to rescue him from poverty, and to clear his name from dishonour. But there could never be a resurrection-day even for the *friendship* of those old times.

"You know it all, then, Honor?" he asked, his lips stiff and dry. "Of course Slimp went to you at once with his own story."

"He came to me this afternoon ; I hope it was at once, as you say, because it will not be well to lose time, Lawrence."

"Time—I have no time left me," he muttered, doggedly ; "Slimp will have bruited my affairs all over Kinbury before this time to-morrow."

"He is to do nothing until this time to-morrow," Honor said ; "then he will come to know my decision."

"On? — Your decision on?" — questioned Lawrence, hurriedly. "Has he been offering *you* the task of?" —

"Never mind what he offered," put in the girl, quietly ; "his offers, as well as his motives, are too despicable to occupy us for a moment. In his selfish haste he has done what both you and I may some day thank him for doing. When he comes to me to-morrow, Lawrence, I hope that you yourself will see him. It will be kind of you to spare me another interview with him, and, besides that, he will understand better from you how unnecessary his interference will be."

"The little dastardly thief," muttered Mr. Haughton, between his teeth ; "it is he who has been the one to tempt me, and to lower me to this pass."

"A poor tempter," said Honor, in quiet scorn.

"Ay, poor enough ; but it is impossible to do business for years with a wily, double-natured sneak, and not find his guidance grow easy, whether one stands up against it at first or not ; especially," he added, with a flash of honesty, "if one's own disposition is to grind and save and—speculate."

"It must have been that," interposed Honor, with a glance of puzzled anxiety ; "for you were never extravagant or reckless in your expenditure."

"No, I have no pleasure in spending on myself—or on anyone else," he answered, bitterly. "You know—for you often said it in old times, Honor—that I saved my money just like old Myddelton. That it was which brought on the passion of speculation ; and see how it has ended. I am a ruined man, and my only chance of even personal safety is cut off now by a traitor who has been my abettor and encourager all along ; and who turned my ruling passion—avarice—to all his own base ends."

"Why talk of him ?" asked Honor, gravely. "Think of what you yourself wish to undo, Lawrence."

"It is too late," he said, and put one hand before his eyes.

"No, not too late, Lawrence, nor is there any risk for your personal safety, as you say. You will be able to leave England when you choose, and with your name unsullied. Tell me if I have done what is right. It was so hard for me to know, because you—and then Mr. Stafford—have managed these things for me, and left me ignorant. Give

me your advice now, Lawrence. Will you have this uncrossed cheque upon my banker here, and take the money yourself to Kinbury to-morrow, or will you have this crossed cheque, and pay it in to your account at Kinbury? Only tell me which, and the sum is left for you to add."

"I—I cannot," faltered Lawrence, brokenly.

"Yes, you can," she answered, with her pretty smile; "you will not let a silly pride come between you and your old ward. We have no need of a lawyer's help, have we?"

"No need," he whispered, in the anguish of many mixed feelings; "but I cannot take it. Oh! Honor, you do not know the half of my deception."

"I think I do," she answered, thoughtfully; "I think that Mr. Slimp would rather tell me more than less."

"I must tell you, and tell you all," he persisted.

"Very well, Lawrence, but not until to-morrow: when you come to-morrow you shall tell me all. Then justice will have been done to those who have been wronged, or are poor."

"Honor," he cried, moving in sudden haste from the position he had so closely maintained, "how can I bear this—to rob you even more than I have done? I cannot. I will go away. I will go to-night, as I always meant to do. If they capture me—if, led on by my own clerk, they bring me back to face the law—it will be simple justice after all; while this—no, I cannot do you such a wrong."

"The wrong has been done to others, Lawrence," said Honor, sadly; "what I ask is, that you will repair it as far as you are able."

"As I am able!" echoed Lawrence, bitterly. "No; it is you who would save me from disgrace and publicity, and I cannot take more from you, Honor. I will leave England to-night."

"Not to-night," she said, with gentle kindness, as she put the cheque into his hand; "I shall not persuade you against going, Lawrence, because you may think it best, but you will not go under fear of pursuit, leaving those wrongs unredressed, and bearing the terrible consciousness of having injured those who trusted you."

"But it is done."

"Yes, it is done," she answered, sadly; "but we can

make amends. All must have what is due to them ; and, Lawrence—my dear old guardian—you can go then with a name which is not hated and dishonoured."

He stood unmoved while she laid the paper in his hand, but she knew that this was the chill of agony, not indifference.

"If," she said, with a great effort to speak cheerfully at last, "if Lawyer Haughton chooses to wind up his affairs and go abroad, what wonder need it cause ? Such things are almost of common occurrence now."

"I can—I can sell my practice then," said Lawrence, with a sudden break in his misery. "If I wait in England to undo this evil, then the practice will be worth what it was before, and I shall not be utterly penniless."

"That will be pleasant," she answered, with a smile. "You will come to-morrow, Lawrence, and tell me all is safe and well. Now I must go."

"But," he said, with a change from his short-lived excitement, "you could not do this, Honor, if you knew what had been my last effort at degradation—you, who always thought so kindly of Gabriel Myddelton, and, through all, believed him innocent."

"I do know," she said quietly, when he paused.

"Slimp told you that too, did he ?" Lawrence Haughton cried. "And did he tell how I, like others, had been a blind fool all along, and that Gabriel Myddelton was innocent ?"

"Yes, he told me that ; and he told me"—the struggle it cost her to say these words as she had said the others was most pitiful—"that you were mistaken when you thought that Gabriel Myddelton had come home as Royden Keith."

No answer ; and she made the words a question, raising her eyes longingly to his.

"Was that true, Lawrence ?"

"I suppose so ; but Heaven only knows," he answered, pettishly. "It has been a studied belief of mine for two years. How can I root it out so suddenly ?"

"But if he had been our cousin Gabriel, would you not immediately have recognized him ?"

"It is more than twelve years since I saw Gabriel Myddelton," Lawrence answered, moodily, and uncon-

sciously betraying his own doubts. "But, remember, Honor," he added, hurriedly, "that if he does prove to be Gabriel, and is innocent, or even if Gabriel Myddelton eventually turns up, you have nothing to fear. Old Myddelton's money was willed to you, and no man on earth, even being a Myddelton, can claim it from you. Remember that, Honor, my"——

But a sense of the fitness of things was able just then to restrain even Lawrence Haughton. He could not see her face plainly now, for the twilight had deepened to the first darkness of the summer night, and the window was narrow, and its panes not over clear, but he spoke with a change of tone.

"Honor, forgive me ; and you will remember what I say, if I am not here. There is no flaw in Lady Lawrence's will, and old Myddelton left her the power of bequeathing his wealth, without any restrictions."

"Yes," she said, absently, as she offered him her hand, "I remember."

He held it tightly in his own, while the old passion, rising with a greater strength than ever, wrote its lines upon his hard, stern face, and while he crushed back with a violent effort the pitiable confession which rushed with almost conquering force to his lips.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he whispered, "for the last time ; and it might have been that"—— Then he broke utterly down, and it was some minutes before he regained the mastery over himself.

Not another word could he utter as he took Honor down and put her into her carriage, not even in answer to her kind good-bye ; and when she had driven out of sight, he was still standing there upon the pavement where she had left him, lost in a deep, regretful dream.

In spite of that cheery look and smile, Honor's heart was very heavy as she drove home ; and through all this doubt would force itself—Was she fulfilling well the trust which her great wealth had brought her ? Only her own heart could answer the question which it asked, but she knew that no such hesitation could have stayed her in this visit to her old guardian.

It was quite early in the afternoon of the next day that

he came to Kensington ; and, in spite of the weight of shame which bowed him down, when he begged her to let him tell her of his delinquencies and debts, she saw a marked change in him, which reminded her of one or two far days back in her old home, when Jane and Phœbe had been away, and he had tried to make his favourite happy without vexing her by any sign or uttered word of love.

She interrupted him continually when he enlarged, with a morbid self-torture, on the failure of so many of his speculations, which, as she had rightly guessed, had been maliciously exaggerated by Mr. Slimp ; and they spent a not unpleasant time together before the time for the clerk's visit.

"You will come upstairs, Lawrence, when he is gone, won't you ?" Honor said, when she rose to leave the room at Mr. Slimp's hour. "I shall wait for you. Phœbe is shopping. I shall be quite alone."

She sat and waited for him, without offering to take either book or work into her hands, her thoughts too deeply engrossed by her old guardian's possible future, and too intensely anxious over it. But she had not long to wait, and she turned with a smile when he entered.

"So soon, Lawrence ! I am glad."

"Yes, he had no wish and no need to stay," said Mr. Haughton, coming forward with a curious and uncharacteristic air of diffidence. "He tried two or three different experiments ; he tried insinuations, and threats, and promises ; but from the first he saw his own mistake. Honor, you bade me help him for you, if he were poor, but he is not poor. He has carefully guarded his own interests always ; and, though he is baffled and mortified, it is, after all, his own doing, and he has not left himself in any awkward circumstances—trust him for that."

"Then we may dismiss every thought and memory of him," said Honor, with a sigh of relief. "And now, Lawrence, tell me more of your own plans."

They sat together for a quiet hour, talking of these plans and hopes. It was an hour which even Honor remembered for years, while for him it was to be of life-long memory, shining like a star in his gloomy past, and ever leading his thoughts to those better things of which she spoke.

His eyes and lips had lost their hardness, when at last he rose to say good-bye. Honor had heard Phœbe Owen's return, and, with her hand upon the door, she stayed him.

"You will like to bid good-bye to Phœbe, Lawrence?"

"No," he cried, hurriedly, "no; let yours be my last. What is Phœbe's compared with?"——

"Stay one minute, Lawrence," she interrupted, grieved to see this momentary return to his old manner. "I will send Phœbe, and yet I will have the last hand-shake. Phœbe was once your ward, as I was. We have only an equal claim upon you; and this, you say, is to be a long good-bye."

And, before he could answer, she was gone.

"Phœbe," said Honor, watching her cousin's face rather curiously as she gave her message, "will you go and see Lawrence? He is going abroad, and is come to bid us good-bye. I shall come in to you presently. And suppose I order tea? Lawrence will not stay and dine with us, but still he may afford to idle away five minutes over a cup of tea."

"Is Lawrence really going abroad?"

The question came from Phœbe's lips, freighted only with surprise. Honor saw this with a feeling of deep thankfulness. The time was come for which she used to long, and Phœbe's inexplicable infatuation was over.

"Why is it?" inquired Miss Owen, standing placidly for her maid to arrange her tunic after the inevitable crushing of the drive. "Why does he go so suddenly?"

"You forget that we cannot expect now to be aware of his plans until they are made public. If he had been intending and preparing for this for months, we should not have known it."

"No, I suppose not," rejoined Phœbe, with the ghost of a sigh; "I'm ready. You won't be long, Honor?"

Honor smiled at the request. It was so unlike the old times, when, to gain a few minutes of her guardian's sole attention, Phœbe would have exercised herself in any harmless stratagem. She waited only a few minutes, timing her entrance just as the footmen carried in the trays; and Lawrence did stay, and Honor's purpose was successful, for the parting was an easy, natural parting, and Mr. Haughton's

feeling was that he had left the house of true friends, who had genially and pleasantly entertained him; not that he had departed in bitter humiliation, with coals of fire heaped upon his head. This was Honor's intention, and she had, as usual, brightly worked its fulfilment.

"Honor, how can it be?" cried Phœbe, when the two girls were left together again. "To think that I have parted from Lawrence, and yet am not broken-hearted! I can hardly believe it—can you?—remembering how different things used to be? I wish he would have told me what first induced him to form this plan."

It was because Honor had feared such questions for him that she had not left him long with Phœbe; but it would seem that Miss Owen had made time for several.

"Jane will be pretty lonely at The Larches," she continued, "but she will keep the house on, Lawrence says. Why, Jane never had above a hundred a year of her own, had she, Honor? Do you think she can manage to live at The Larches on that? Lawrence says Slimp is in London now, and likely to stay here. I wonder whether his leaving the office had anything to do with Lawrence's decision; because I always thought Slimp would stay in Kinbury all his life—didn't you?"

So the girl ran on, but Honor managed to evade her answers; while every minute now, as night drew on, her own anxiety grew greater and greater for tidings from Hervey, or tidings which Hervey might possibly bring.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It's hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

CAPTAIN TRENT journeyed to Westleigh by the first train from London, yet it was past mid-day when he pulled the great iron bell beside the arched door of The Towers. From the moment this door was thrown open to him, a certain

hush upon the house made the contrast wonderfully strong between this day and that merry one he had spent here before, when old Mrs. Payte arrived so suddenly with Honor, and the house had been filled with gaiety and laughter. Yes, Mr. Keith was at home, the grave old butler told him, and led him to a long, high room on the right of the hall—a room in which the solitary figure of an old lady, sewing beside the window, looked almost like a doll's.

"Mr. Keith," she repeated, dubiously, as she came forward to receive Hervey's bow and inquiry, "he—yes, I have no doubt he will see you; but he is far from well. You will excuse the liberty I take, as an old woman, Captain Trent," glancing at his card, "if I ask you not to let me summon Mr. Keith if—if it is unnecessary, or"—

Hervey read the real anxiety in the pleasant face—to read such thoughts as these was not impossible to him now—but he could not guess how rarely had visitors lately brought any pleasure to Royden.

"Indeed," he said, in what Phœbe called "his nice way," "I would not ask to see Mr. Keith at all if I felt that I were bringing him worry or anxiety. Let me assure you that it is quite the reverse."

Miss Henderson smiled, partly in relief, and partly in acknowledgment of the courtesy of Hervey's manner.

"I will take your card," she said, and left him alone in the long room.

Only a few minutes passed before Royden entered; and at that moment Captain Trent experienced the greatest shock he had felt through all his life, though he little guessed how long the effect of this sudden shock was to hover about him, and have its share in deepening the growing seriousness of his own thoughts and feelings.

"My God, Keith!" he faltered, incapable of hiding his pained astonishment, "have you been so ill?"

"I have not been ill," said Royden, quietly, as he took Hervey's outstretched hand; "I mean, not worse than I am now. If an illness is my doom, it is in the future, not the past."

"Sit down," said Hervey, losing every trace of his old affectation, as he drew forward a large arm-chair, and,

taking a seat himself to insure Royden's taking his, tried to remove his frightened gaze from his companion's face—so worn and pallid, and yet bearing still, even in its weakness, that wonderful strength of patience and steadfastness which, far more than any difference in features and form, made the contrast between these two men so striking.

"How are all my old friends, Captain Trent?" inquired Royden, seeing much of the change in Hervey—for his glance, though weary and feverish, had its old keen power—and wondering a little over it.

"All well," said Hervey, trying to talk easily. "I have come as messenger from one of them."

"Are Mrs. and Miss Trent in London still?"

The question was cool and easy, and the listener could not detect its motive.

"Yes," rejoined Hervey, with unconcealed indifference, "indeed they are."

"And your other cousins?"

"Phœbe," replied Hervey, feeling his way gradually to the message, "could not be better, I fancy; she enjoys three days for every one she lives this season."

"That is pleasant for her."

"But Honor," resumed Captain Trent, not succeeding in his effort to be quite at ease, "does not seem well, or happy."

No answer, and Royden's eyes were fixed upon the sunny grass beyond the open window. But even Hervey could see that some thought had deeply shadowed them.

"And she bade me," continued Hervey, his voice taking an earnestness which the memory of her words had brought, "see you, Mr. Keith, and tell you this message; I must say it in her own words, it will be easiest and best. She said, 'Will you tell him that I have a great longing to see my own cousin, Gabriel Myddelton, and I beg him to help me, if he can.' That was her message, Keith, just as she entrusted it to me. What answer may I take her?"

"You shall take her Gabriel's own answer, if you will," he said, speaking sadly, after a slight pause. "He will be grateful for this message from the only one of all his house who has ever spoken kindly of him, or doubted his guilt."

He will be very glad of it, especially if you deliver it yourself, as you have done to me."

"But how would that be possible?"

"Would you go to him if it were possible?"

"Yes—certainly. I would fulfil Honor's wish to the letter."

"Then, if you will stay with me to-night, I will give you an address in Liverpool where, to-morrow, you will find Gabriel Myddelton—where now his wife is waiting to receive him."

"His—wife."

"His wife," repeated Royden, quietly. "For some time she has been staying here with an old friend of hers, the lady whom you met just now; but yesterday she went to Liverpool to await the vessel in which her husband sailed from America. His life is safe on English ground now, and he is glad to come."

"How did he know?" faltered Captain Trent.

"I telegraphed to him the very hour his innocence was proved. I hoped to go and greet him when he landed, but I could not."

Hervey sat in silence, his thoughts growing tangled.

"This is all so strange," he said, when at last one of those thoughts found words. "Can Gabriel Myddelton really be landing in England to-day?"

"Really!"

"And married?"

"And married, Captain Trent. Even with that brand upon his name, he found one who would link her life with his, and who—but that her health failed, and he entreated her to save it for his sake—would never have parted from him."

"And she has been here?"

"Yes, visiting me for some time; we are very old friends; and Miss Henderson and she are very old friends, too. I should have gone with her, as I said, if had been better. I hoped Miss Henderson would go instead, but she would not consent to leave me. So Alice Myddelton went with Mr. Romer—you have not forgotten what a good fellow your old rector was, Captain Trent?"

"Indeed I have not, though he was never very fond of me."

They talked a little longer, but never alluded again to those old days in Statton; and presently dinner was announced. Royden took his place at table, but Hervey noticed that he touched nothing on his plate, and though he talked a little, Hervey could see that his strength was soon exhausted, and that Miss Henderson grew painfully anxious.

With an unusual thoughtfulness, Captain Trent strolled out alone after dinner, and, when he came in, he devoted himself to the old lady, and left Royden to what rest he could obtain.

Captain Trent was ready next morning for the earliest train to Liverpool—industriously and anxiously was he fulfilling this trust confided to him—but early as it was, Royden came down into the hall as the horses drew up at the door.

"You will find no difficulty, I think," he said, with a grasp of his hot fingers. "I am very glad you are going, and your cousin will be glad too."

"Honor, you mean?"

"No; I mean Gabriel."

"Have you any message for Honor?" inquired Hervey, hoping that he should not need to tell her how Mr. Keith was looking.

"No," he answered, without a change of tone, for he had schooled himself for this. "Her wish will be fulfilled. She will see her cousin, Gabriel Myddelton."

From the carriage, Hervey looked back upon the two standing in old-fashioned hospitality to see him off.

"He looks—dying," mused Captain Trent to himself, with an uncomfortable shudder, "and the old lady seems to know it too. She is not very wise, though, to show so plainly that she knows it. Even the servants seem under a cloud. I verily believe he has made them fond of him, in an old-fashioned sort of style. They do not look like domestic machines. How courageously he defied his illness last night, when he went out to speak to those fishermen, and how he entered into all they had to say, standing there with his dogs about him. I believe even the dogs are fretting to see him changed."

Hervey Trent did not arrive in Liverpool until a whole

day after the landing of the passengers from the Cunard steamer, and he had little difficulty in finding Gabriel Myddelton at the hotel to which Royden had directed him. The moment he met his cousin face to face, he knew him. It was the face from the picture at Abbotsmoor ; it was the face, though so much changed, of the boy-cousin Hervey could remember playing with, and always envying as heir of Abbotsmoor, and of old Myddelton's money.

Involuntarily he held out his hand, and welcomed Gabriel in tones that were unusually warm and genial for Captain Hervey Trent. Of course Gabriel did not recognize him at first, and, when he did, his welcome seemed much colder than Hervey's ; but this was only due to the reserve which had grown upon him during his twelve years' banishment.

Beside his manner, that of Alice seemed almost cordial. Perhaps much of her timidity had left her, now that she felt her husband near her once again, and in safety ; but perhaps it was the contrast to Gabriel's dreamy reticence.

Hervey had just repeated again, word for word, the message with which he had been charged, and Gabriel had answered, with a gratitude which was almost touching, that he would go in person to thank Honor, after he had seen Royden, when a telegram was brought into the room.

It was addressed to Alice, but her fingers trembled so sadly, while she held it, that Gabriel gently took it and opened it for her ; Hervey, waiting beside them, felt his heart sink with fear. The telegram was from Miss Henderson at Westleigh Towers, and these were the words it bore :—

“At Mr. Keith's request I send this to stop your return here. For you in your delicate health, and for Mr. Myddelton, after his voyage, it would be highly unwise to come. Ask Mr. Myddelton to let us know where you stay, and I will write. Mr. Keith even wished me to leave him too. It is aggravated typhoid fever, Dr. Franklin fears, but he has telegraphed for further advice. We can easily guess by what it has been brought on, and indeed by what accelerated since. Of course I shall not leave. I will write, but do not be alarmed if you do not hear very soon. Every minute of my day is too little to give him.”

"Oh, Gabriel!" cried his wife, clasping her hands about his arm when the telegram fell from his fingers. "What shall we do? Oh, poor, poor Roy?"

"There is but one thing for me to do," said Gabriel, with intense sorrow in his face and voice; "but, dear wife, where can I leave you?"

"How—do you mean?"—

"That I must go to him; but I am such a stranger now in my native land that I cannot choose for you, except that—as he says—you must *not* go to Westleigh."

Then Hervey came to the rescue.

"If Mrs. Myddelton will let me escort her to London," he said, earnestly, "I am sure I could not take back to Honor any better acknowledgment of her message."

"Do you think so?" inquired Gabriel, eagerly. "You know her best, do you really think so?"

"I am sure, very sure," replied Hervey, promptly; "here is Mr. Romer; ask him, for he knows Honor too."

It was readily settled, and Mr. Romer (who had invented business in Liverpool most of that day, thinking his company unneeded) seconded the idea so warmly, and made the arrangements with such promptness, that the plan was carried out almost as soon as proposed. Mr. Romer himself returned, by his own particular wish, to Westleigh Towers; and though Gabriel fancied he went as guide to him, the real reason was the rector's earnest desire to be with Royden now.

They travelled only halfway by rail, and then, finding no fast train would take them on, and no train at all would stop at Westleigh that night, they posted; and having four strong horses they could see the castellated towers of Royden's home rise before them in the melancholy light of the July midnight.

Just at that hour Gabriel's wife sat with Honor Craven in the luxurious little dressing-room which (as well as the chamber beyond, with its girlish trifles lying about, and its soft pink hangings) had been hastily prepared for Alice, and tried to tell her the story of her life.

"I can tell it to you," she had sobbed in her fatigue and helplessness, when she had read the lovely earnest face of this new cousin, who met her so kindly and made her so wonderfully at home, "I wonder why."

"Because," said Honor, with her bright, sweet smile, "I am the nearest relation your husband has, and should like to be a near friend of yours."

There was a wonderful contrast between the two girls as they sat together before the pleasant little fire which Honor had ordered because the midnight air was chill, and Alice (partly in fear, and partly in weakness) had been shivering downstairs. Not in the features alone was this contrast evident, but, more strongly still, in the natures which looked from their eyes. The strength and steadfastness of the one, the perfect oblivion of self and wide thought for others, and the gentle helpfulness, no less than the rich and radiant beauty, made more evident the nervous timidity, the shy, mistrusting reticence, and the shrinking from responsibility, no less than the fair, fragile prettiness of the other.

"I have not much to tell, but I wish I could tell it better. What he has done for Gabriel, I dare not speak of; Gabriel must tell it for himself. His has been a long, long course of kindness, which he has practised just naturally, as he does all good things. Oh! if I could only tell you of these kindnesses for me and for Gabriel—if I only could—but I cannot. Miss Craven, what have I said to bring the tears to your eyes? It was in Germany, nearly twelve years ago—you have heard of the old gentleman who left his name and property to Mr. Keith? It was just before that time that I met him first, since (seven years before) we had been children together, and near neighbours in an English county. He was a barrister, though he was not practising just then, and his name was Royden Sydney. He went to America after that on the same vessel—he, and my father and I. He was a very rich man then, and going to the New World for pleasure. On that voyage"—

"Do not tell me to-night," put in Honor, with a gentle caress, as she saw the tears gather in Alice's eyes.

"Yes, I would rather tell, please. On that voyage my father died quite suddenly, and I was left entirely alone in the world, for I had no other relation—I had even no friend. What a friend *he* was upon that voyage, and afterwards, I never could tell you. His care and friendship did not cease when we had landed, and it was only through his help (exerted in so many ways) that I obtained a livelihood.

for my father's income died with him, and I was almost penniless. One day—I remember it as if it might have been to-day—there appeared at the house of the gentleman whose wife had, at Mr. Keith's request, taken me to be her companion, a young man who, not having found the master at the office, had come on to the house, and been admitted amongst us all. That very evening Mr. Keith (he was an honoured guest there) had returned from Peru, and he happened to be with us when this young man entered. I saw him watching the scene keenly, and I felt that what he saw of the new-comer he liked or recognized. The merchant would not engage a clerk who came with no testimonials and no recommendations, unless he could give security for two hundred pounds. I saw the quiet, steady look deepening in Mr. Keith's eyes—it was so sad to me to watch the anxious face of the young man who, though evidently an English gentleman, pleaded so urgently for this situation, that I watched Mr. Keith instead—then presently he said he would pay the security down, and Mr. Hollys, the Boston merchant, could repay it to his clerk when he dismissed him. From that time Gabriel and I"—

"I understand," said Honor, softly, when she paused.

"And we married soon," resumed Alice, wiping away her tears hurriedly; "and we loved each other dearly, and were very happy, though our lives have known many sorrows, and our hearts have often failed and fretted. But the greater part have all been lightened for us by that one kind hand, and our sorrow often turned to joy by him. Oh! how I wish that I could tell you how."

"At last," she went on presently, folding her weak hands in her lap, "my health failed, and Gabriel's heart seemed breaking, because they told him that, to save my life, I must be sent home to England, and he knew he dared not come. He had told me all the story of old Mr. Myddelton's murder, and of the trial, every word, before he won my promise to marry him; and so, of course, I knew why we could not go, for neither he nor I had any English friends; but again our one true friend came to the rescue, and he brought me to his own beautiful home. That was two years ago, and I have been getting better and stronger ever since. Now that Gabriel has come, I

know that I shall soon be quite strong again. I found, one day, in that foreign land, an old friend of my mother's, who, through loss of her property invested in mines, was living a struggling life out there; and—quite unthinkingly—I told Gabriel, in Mr. Keith's presence, of how I had traced her. Royden remembered this—as he remembers all opportunities for kindness—and, when the question arose about my going to England, and he said he was returning, and gave me that offer of a home, he begged that she should come too; and—you know the rest. Our home at Westleigh—Miss Henderson's and mine—has been a peaceful and happy one. No word or glance has ever told that it was not ours equally with his; and for those two years he has tried, ah! so earnestly and patiently, to clear Gabriel's name, that my husband might come and live again in his native country. Gabriel had told him the whole story when he so generously offered me this home in England, for we thought it might make him retract the offer. Yet how could we ever think that of him? It only made him determine—for he never doubted Gabriel's version of the story, never—to trace out the real murderer, if it were in man's power to do so. You know that he has succeeded, as no other man could; for, but for his pity and his help, Margaret Territ would have burnt that confession. Oh! how full my heart is when I speak of him, and what can I ever do in return? What can I ever do, but what the very smallest child he helps may do as well—just pray my God to bless him.”

Honor's head was bowed upon her hands, and it was not until Phoebe tapped gently at the door to hasten her, that she raised her face again; then Alice saw the marks of tears, and wished she had not told any sad tales to-night.

On the next day but one came the anxiously expected letters, one from Miss Henderson, and one from Gabriel—both short and very sad.

Miss Henderson told of the fluctuating nature of Royden's fever, of the skill of the four physicians, of the calmness of the Sister engaged as nurse, and of the unfeigned sorrow of the servants; finishing with the hope that Alice herself was better, the letter being evidently a composition studied, from beginning to end, to keep up her spirits.

But Gabriel's was different. He told of the violence of the fever, the awful suffering, and the intermittent attacks of delirium ; of the total absence of all rest or ease ; the discouraging opinions of the physicians ; the dulness of the nurse, and the awkwardness of which he himself was painfully conscious in his own attendance beside the sick-bed.

Alice read this letter aloud, as she had read the other ; but suddenly, as she reached the end of the sad recital, she made an abrupt pause.

"I—I think I will not read the rest," she said, in her nervous, frightened way ; it may grieve you, Honor."

Honor gazed at her in mute surprise.

"Grieve me," she echoed, sadly. "Could anything grieve me more deeply than those words which you have just read ?"

"This is about yourself—that is why I stopped," explained Alice, characteristically.

"Will you—read it, please ?"

"You are sure you wish it ?"

"Quite—quite sure."

Alice took up the letter again and read ; and when she had finished, Honor answered, "Thank you," very softly, while Alice wondered over the nature she could not understand ; for these were the words she had read—

"Chiefly, in all his delirium, he calls one name—*Honor*. Can it be my cousin he longs to see ? You had better not tell her, perhaps, as it is very sad to hear it ; and I would rather not know that she has given him such a deep unhappiness as I feel him to be suffering, when I listen to the tone in which he calls her, or speaks to her. It makes this bitter watching more bitter even than it need be ; and oh, Alice, I feel now for him—as I used to feel for myself—how impossible it is to minister to a mind diseased. 'Do not tell her,' I said—and yet I leave it to you. You will know best."

A few minutes afterwards, Honor went alone into the library, where Hervey waited to hear the tidings from Westleigh. He started when she came in, for she might have passed through a long illness since he had seen her last night. But she did not wait for him to question her.

"Hervey," she said, "I—do not look at me so ; I am

well—I only want to speak to you, Hervey. Phœbe will tell you of Gabriel's letter ; I will send her to you. I am going on a journey, and I want to know if you will come with me. You took the same journey for me once before—for me then, not *with* me. Cousin Hervey, will you come with me now to Westleigh Towers ? Can you come at once—now, please, Hervey, or we may be—too late.”

“Honor, dear Honor, I am ready.”

CHAPTER XL.

My shadow falls upon my grave,
So near the brink I stand.

Hood.

WHILE Phœbe was still telling Captain Trent of Gabriel's letter, Honor re-entered the room, her hat tilted low over her tell-tale eyes.

“Take care of Gabriel's wife,” she whispered, her pulses quickening as the carriage rolled past the window near which they stood, and the restive horses were pulled up before the door.

“I wish I had ascertained about the trains,” fretted Hervey, as he followed the girls into the hall. “If there are none beyond Langham, I don't know what we shall do.”

“I have sent a groom on horseback,” said Honor, quietly, “and he is to telegraph on for post horses. Good-bye, dear little Frau ?”

Yet for all her quietness, Hervey felt her hand tremble on his arm, when he led her out to the carriage, and through the whole journey, though she sat so still and patiently, the restlessness and anxiety within her eyes were pitiful to see. And beyond this, there was another misery which Hervey little guessed of. The consciousness of what might have been, if she had doubted then, as she had doubted now, those words which Theodora Trent had represented as Royden's. *Doubted!* Ah ! no, she had never *doubted*, even then.

“I—I must have hated myself,” she thought, “if I could have believed *him* to have said them—even then. But he

took me by surprise. She had only just told me, and—not as if the words were—a falsehood.”

By Honor's wish, the chaise was stopped at the park gates of Westleigh Towers, and she and Hervey descended. A little crowd had collected at the door of the lodge; women who had run from their cottages to hear the latest tidings; fishermen who had walked straight up from the beach to hear of the master before they entered their own homes; men and women who had walked from the mills to-day round the high-road, on purpose to hear what might be learnt from the physicians, as they drove through these western gates back to the station; a homely throng, which drew back when the foaming post-horses stopped at the gate, and—in spite of the anxiety upon their faces—never obtruded an inquisitive word or glance. Honor's sad eyes rested on them for a minute, then she moved on with a hurried start, for she dared not trust herself to hear the words which they might say.

“Hervey,” she said, glancing up at the castellated towers as they neared the house, “how silent it is!”

“Oh! that's nothing,” asserted Hervey, promptly. “Of course there's no band playing, and that sort of thing. My dear Honor, what sound would you have?”

“It was so different when I was here before.”

“Of course, because the house was full of guests.”

“But even the dogs are gone!”

“Yes, strange to say,” returned Hervey, making an effort to speak with a great deal of ease and unconcern, “they persist in standing or lying about the hall in a manner ridiculously abject. As if *they* need conspire to make things more dismal than they are! It is a mistake to cultivate dogs.”

Royden's grave old butler showed no surprise when he admitted the beautiful young lady, for whose coming no preparation had been made, but he was conscious of a great astonishment filling his mind, when he noticed how softly and quietly she entered the sick-house, and how, as she followed him across the hall, she stopped to speak by name to one of Royden's dogs, and to lay her hand caressingly upon his drooping head. “She, too,” thought the old man, with a glance into her anxious face, “is distressed about the master.” He was standing then beside the door to which

he had led her, but just at that moment Mr. Keith's valet happened to cross the hall, and Honor, who knew him well, paused, her eyes full of mute and anxious questioning. But Pierce, with only a silent bow, passed on. How could he stop there in the full light—he, a man of middle age—with his eyes full of tears?

"Hervey," whispered Honor, when the consins were left alone in the long drawing-room, "I saw a Sister of Mercy on the stairs, and she—she had *no* hope in her face."

"They never have," asserted Hervey, glibly, "never, my dear. They wouldn't be proper Sisters if they had."

Miss Henderson answered immediately the note from Alice Myddelton, which was given her with Honor's card, and she came in to greet Miss Craven with the most strong-minded determination to give cheerful impressions generally, and to report, with particular cheerfulness, of Royden. But Miss Henderson was not by any means a strong-minded person, her heart being some hundreds of years from its fossil condition; and so it happened that the moment she met Honor's eyes she broke down ignominiously, and cried like a child. And Honor, holding both her hands, and kissing her now and then in her gentle, pitiful way, cried with her, while Hervey kept his face turned to the window.

But Miss Henderson had not come then from the sick-room, and she herself was waiting anxiously for tidings.

"The physicians are in consultation," she said, "and only the nurse in attendance—of course with Mr. Myddelton. Pierce sent to London for Sir Edward Graham yesterday, and he is here to-day too, and brought another physician with him. Pierce says Mr. Keith knew Sir Edward very well, and often visited him in London. Dr. Franklin, of Westleigh, has been here ever since the first alarm. But they all say the same thing," sobbed Miss Henderson, again forgetting her determination, "that there is imminent danger in these restless attacks of fever alternating with such death-like exhaustion. I, through all those three or four weeks before the fever asserted itself, was haunted by a fear of what was coming. He said it was weariness—headache; he said sometimes that it was *nothing*. But I knew he could not look *so* unless—something else was near."

It was just at this moment that the room door was opened, and Honor, turning her eyes to see, started to her feet with a cry which sounded almost glad.

"Gabriel!"

He, too, had recognised her in that moment, and the cousins met with both hands extended, while for that moment there was a smile on each of their faces.

"Honor," said Gabriel, very quietly, "of course I knew you, Honor."

She told him how she had longed to see him, and how glad she was that he had come home, though——

"Yes," he said, finishing the sentence for her, sadly. "Though it was so good to come home, *this* has turned the pleasure into pain."

Then he tried to change his tone again, and tell her he had recognised her in a moment from what Royden had written of her, and how he thanked her for her trust in his innocence, of which Royden had told him too. But her thoughts would scarcely follow these words, and he knew it.

"I am to await the physicians here," he said, only glancing at his wife's letter, when Hervey gave it to him, but putting it carefully into his pocket-book.

"She is well," said Honor, gently, "only so very anxious."

"She knows," he said, "that we are only watching here to see him—die!"

"God is so good!" breathed Honor, softly.

"Mr. Myddelton," put in Miss Henderson, "with a little sternness in her tone, 'you always fear the worst—the very worst.'"

"How can I help fearing," questioned Gabriel, betraying the timidity which had been so fatal to him years ago, "when I think what he has been to me and to my wife, and how powerless I am now to help or give him ease."

"Is he always unconscious?" asked Hervey.

"Always; as far as we can judge. He sometimes seems to wake to a little quickened intelligence, but it is only to fall back into the old vague or fevered wandering. Miss Henderson is right, I do fear the very worst. All my old nervousness and mistrust come back to me in the presence of this anguish. Yet I had fancied that these long twelve years, and his help, and his example, had made me stronger

and more trustful. Honor, has Alice told you what he has been to us ? ”

“ To her,” said Honor, every word an effort to her. “ She said you would tell me more—some day.”

“ Let me tell you now, while we can do nothing but wait here. There may come a time when I dare not speak of it ; when it will break my heart to recall, in words, his prompt, unquestioning trust in my innocence of that crime which banished me ; his patient efforts to clear my name, and make it possible for me to come home ; his manlike forbearance when suspicion rested basely even on himself ; his true, earnest help, through these twelve years ; and, above all, that simple, generous kindness of his, which was the cause, at last—as nothing else on earth could have been—of my innocence being proved. Honor, I can only tell you now the story of our first meeting, but even that will tell you much I dare not speak of. You have heard of my escape from prison, and the rumour (which was true) that I sailed from England to America in an emigrant vessel. My steerage passage was taken for me by the man whom Territ employed to see me on board, and then I had just five shillings in my pocket, which I slipped into his hand in gratitude when we parted. Neither my watch nor my ring could I venture to sell, because the Myddelton crest upon them might have led to my capture. I had left them in Margaret Territ's care on the night I had changed my coat at her cottage, but she had given them back to me on my escape from the jail. She had offered me money—all she had—but that of course I would not touch. Even in America, and even to keep myself from destitution, I felt I never should dare to part with my watch and ring, such a terror of detection was upon me ever.

“ That was a miserable voyage, even beyond the misery of dwelling on the injustice which had forced me to this flight. Of course I naturally shrank from all companionship with those about me, but I knew I should equally have done so if they had been of my own grade. What fellowship had I now with any man on earth ? The poor wretches around me, huddling together in poverty and uncleanness, had more companionship with one another than I had with any one under that wide stretch of sky, which was all I cared to

look upon ; for could I regret the shore I left behind, or build one hope upon the shore I was to reach ? I know now how different it *might* have been, even in that voyage ; but it was, as I have said, a time of acute and morbid suffering to me.

“ One gentleman among the cabin passengers often spoke to me when I was on deck, often spoke, indeed, to many of us. Of all the state passengers, he was the only one who could spare one of those idle hours on board for such as I, or who had a cheery word to give us in our seeming roughness, or helplessness, or squalor. As good to me were these hours he gave me as was the first glimpse of the old country's shores a week ago—better, because sometimes, in the quiet starlight, or the sunset time, he would talk of another shore which was more surely *home*.

“ When we landed at Levi Point, and I stood alone on shore among the luggage—scarcely one article of which belonged to myself—hopeless and spiritless, and weighed down with that sense of utter loneliness which I knew must be my doom for ever, this gentleman came up to me. His first-class ticket was for Boston, he said, and as he was not going so far, he would like me to take it, because he knew the third-class emigrant trains were often a week upon the road. For one minute I morbidly resented his cognizance of my poverty, but in the next I humbly and gratefully accepted his gift, knowing I could not have provided myself even with dry bread through that week of travelling.

When we stopped at Richmond, he sought me out again, and—in spite of my workman's dress and sullen humour—took me to dine, and talked with me as with an equal (yet as no one had ever talked to me before) while we walked back to the station at nightfall. The third-class train was just coming in when we reached the station, and I remember well how, for a few minutes, he stood back, and, rather sadly and intently, watched the passengers as they crowded out from the platform. Then he left me, and moving quietly and easily among these poor tired creatures, he seemed to give help or encouragement to all, as—God bless him !—I believe it is *natural* to him to do. Honor, I remember once, when he had managed to get tea for a forlorn little crowd (men who, like myself, had not a

penny in their pockets, and women and children who had not tasted food for four-and-twenty hours, because—like myself, too—they had not thought to store for after-use any of their last meals on board), I saw them actually crying over him, and touching him with a reverence which, in that time and place, was terribly pathetic. Could I be ashamed if I, too, were as foolish?

“He left the cars at the last station before Boston, and when he took my hand and bade me God speed, I could not answer him a single word, because I felt that our paths in life could never cross again. But I was to meet him once more in a week’s time. Can I ever forget that first week in Boston? Each day was worse to me, I think, than those I had passed in the condemned cell, under sentence of death. Every hour of daylight I spent in my pursuit of work, toiling along every street of the great city, and calling in at every office and every store. I had no need of guide or directory, for I would call *everywhere*; I would not miss a single door until I either found employment or fell by the way.

“Those were days of literal starvation, Honor; and when the darkness stopped me in my search, I could only creep into a police-cell, and, with a tin of water for my supper, lay myself down upon a board and try to sleep so; while other men lay near me, poor and homeless as myself.

“Sometimes, with a faint chance of success, I was sent from one store to another at a distance, but always—after the vain effort—I came back to the same spot, and went on from door to door, never missing one, and often tempted, instead of my vain request for work, to cry for a mouthful of food. And often I was hurried back into the street with suspicion, because so hungrily I had been watching the dollars changing hands in the stores.

“Sometimes I met with men as weak and poor and hopeless as myself, who had come from the old country with a store of energy and money too, but had sunk until they were what I saw them, deep in poverty and gloom. And sometimes I saw men rich and prosperous, and was told that they had worked their own way up, without the aid of capital or friends.

“Sometimes I met with one of those who had sailed

with me, and he would tell me, perhaps, of his bitter homesickness, wondering that I did not own to that ; wondering, above all, why I should hurry past the post-office, where my own countrymen, in crowds, waited eagerly for news of home. It is a sad tale to tell you, Honor, at this sad time, but it will soon be over now.

"A week of this ceaseless work went past, and I was gaunt and hollow-cheeked ; ill with almost constant ague, and having the appearance, as I knew quite well, of being only half-witted, in my nervous attempts to conceal the fact that I was almost barefoot. At last, one day, came a change of thought and plan which saved me.

"I was standing just within the door of a printer's office, waiting for an opportunity of asking whether they would engage me on what terms they chose, and leaning against the packets of paper, ill, footsore, and famished, when a sound, which had seemed to me the surging of waters about my head, grew first into raised, distinct tones, then into phrases which I could follow.

"Two men were comparing their early struggles for a livelihood, and recalling how one turning-point had brought them each success at last. In my weakness, and with that surging pain in my head, I could not follow the words quite distinctly, yet this one thing I understood—my only chance of obtaining employment was to seek it as a *gentleman* (what a mockery it was to recall my old life now!), and as if employment were of little value to me.

"I knew what the men meant, and I crept from the store, and tried to rouse my failing energies to think out this thought, and face my possibility of success. I *was* successful, Honor ; not because these men were right in their random assertion, and not because I acted my new part well, but because on that day Heaven was so merciful as to guide me to the one who had helped and befriended me before.

"It was my last desperate chance, and of course I was willing to stake upon it the little I possessed. I even dared the possibility of being traced, for—if it failed—what was my freedom worth ?

"In return for my watch and ring I obtained a suit of clothes in which I might begin my new search as a *gentle-*

man. It never entered my head to doubt its being worth what I paid for it, and I was truly grateful to the man who equipped me. When he asked me to accept a shilling for my dinner, and, following me to the door, said kindly that he should be very glad to hear of my luck, I felt—in my new-born hope—that I could hardly thank him enough.

“If Alice told you of our first meeting, Honor, you know the rest of my story. From the office of a rich stock-broker, to whom that very day I applied for an engagement, I was sent on to his private residence. It was the house in which Alice lived as governess, and Royden Keith was visiting there that very day. The master of the house heard all I had to say, but told me decisively then that he could engage no man for a post of trust without securities. He told me afterwards that he said it chiefly to get rid of me, thinking me sickly, and unpleasantly persistent. Somehow just then Mr. Keith seemed to take the arrangement of the matter quietly into his own hands, and I was engaged. Ah, what a night of gratitude and hope that was, and with what joy I walked two miles next morning at daybreak, to tell the tailor of my success!

“When I had been in that office only one year, Honor, I had won my employer’s confidence, and the money was repaid to Royden Keith which he had advanced for me. Two years afterwards, Alice and I were married, and for a wedding gift my employer gave me the share in his business which it had been my ambition some day to buy. Soon afterwards he died, and when news came to me, three weeks ago, that I might come home, I was able to sell the business to my junior partner, and bring home an income sufficient for our wants.

“Honor, you see that it is not only my liberty I owe to Royden Keith, but all that I possess, and—even my life, I think.”

Honor’s eyes were covered with her hand; Hervey had walked away again to the window, and there was utter silence in the room when Gabriel’s voice ceased. But suddenly Honor rose, her whole form trembling, for her listening ears had caught the physicians’ steps.

They all three came quietly into the room, two gentlemen

with white hair and grave, thoughtful faces, and one with young but careworn features, and an unconquerable nervousness, which yet betrayed no want of skill or decision. This was Dr. Franklin, of Westleigh, and in a moment he recognised Honor, whom he had often met at Statton Rectory. When he had spoken to her, and was about to return to the sick-room with Gabriel, one of the elder physicians came forward, making his shrewd guess with promptness.

"Miss Honor Craven," he said, as if he felt that in such a scene as this there was no need of form, "I could hardly be a London man and not know you by sight and name. Will you pardon my bluntness if I ask you one question?"

She offered him her hand with a faint little smile, and while he spoke he kept it in his own.

"Our patient, in his delirium, calls one name persistently, not consciously, nor with any knowledge that he calls it, but still at any moment it might be that he knew her. It is Honor. Is she here?"

"Yes."

The girl's answer was a very whisper, but the old physician heard it.

"I see. And are you prepared to witness his acute and restless suffering? Should you be afraid to see the frequent changes of strife and exhaustion? Think well before you speak, for your presence must either do great good or serious harm."

"You will be unwise to permit it, Sir Edward," put in the other London physician; "it is not a post for her. It is not a sight for one who has never seen life hanging by a thread."

"I have great confidence," rejoined Sir Edward, with a sign for his silence, "in a naturally fine and unimpaired constitution. If he can only have a little sleep"—

"If I may go," said Honor, raising her eyes to Sir Edward, who read their bravery and patience through their yearning, "I will do exactly what you bid me. I can be very still and silent, and I am very wakeful. I am used to sickness; I am used, even, to—death. Please to feel how steady my hand is."

It was not Hervey only who turned away his eyes, as if the pathos of her low words hurt him.

"Can you rest first?" Sir Edward asked, presently. "It would fit you a little better for your watch."

"The only rest that I can know," she said, "will be to watch him."

"That is well," put in the strange physician, in a tone of relief, as, for the first time, he removed his critical gaze from her face, "it will be well, Graham; let Miss Craven go. For her it is kinder to consent than to pretend to spare her; and for him—we shall see."

"Thank you," she said, with touching simplicity. "I will do exactly as you bid me. Hervey," she added, laying both her hands upon her cousin's, "you will tell them the doctors let me stay? Give them my love, and—take care of them. Good-bye."

"I think," remarked Sir Edward, aside to his friend, "that we shall not regret this step."

With Honor's parting words, and Gabriel's message to his wife, and Miss Henderson's tearful assurance that she would not let Miss Craven over-fatigue herself, and Sir Edward Graham's remark that Honor's presence was his strongest source of hope for his patient, Hervey left Westleigh Towers that evening.

"I cannot wait to see you after you have been—to him, Honor," he said; "if it is as Dr. Franklin and Gabriel fear, I—dare not."

So he went, as Honor followed Sir Edward Graham to Royden's chamber.

CHAPTER XLI.

Friendship often ends in Love, but
Love in Friendship—never.

COLTON.

PHŒBE OWEN had had an invitation for that night, which, a little time before, it would have cost her a bitter pang to refuse; yet she hovered kindly and cheerfully now about Alice Myddelton, and entertained her pleasantly with desultory chat, which, though it might not be of a deep or original character, was yet varied withal, and sufficiently enlivening to make these waiting hours pass easily for Alice.

Yet Phœbe was, all the time, listening anxiously for the sound of wheels, or the visitors' bell, or the sharp, double rap of a telegraph messenger. And when, at last, a cab stopped, and a familiar step ascended the stairs, it was Phœbe who sprang first to her feet, and it was Phœbe's eager voice which uttered the first greeting and question.

"Oh, Hervey, we are so glad to see you! Where is Honor? How is Mr. Keith?"

"No better," he answered, as he took her hand.

"No better," she echoed, mournfully. "Oh Alice, think of that, after our long waiting!"

But Alice had hidden her face, and was crying bitterly; so Phœbe's energies were immediately devoted to soothing and cheering her; and Hervey (totally at a loss himself, felt little inclination to treat her excitement with his old languid contempt.

To his great relief dinner was soon announced, and Phœbe turned to him with a simple, but to him rather comical, assumption of the matronly hostess.

"Will you take Mrs. Myddelton, Hervey, and I will follow?"

Of course he offered her his other arm, but she refused it, with a remembrance of his old prejudice, and walked demurely behind them, with no anxiety about a cover not being laid for Hervey, so long as any one of Honor's servants knew that he was in the house.

To each one of the little party the presence of the servants during the next hour was a relief. The restraint and the necessity for trivial subjects of conversation were a preparation for what there was to tell and to hear, and a pause of rest between the old suspense and the new certainty.

Hervey did his best to make the meal a pleasant one; and Phoebe, at the head of the table, did her best to take Honor's place; while the ease of both her guests, and the active courtesy of one, proved that she had to a certain extent succeeded. Yet could they not shake off the vague shadow of fear which brooded among them.

"May I come?" inquired Hervey, as Phoebe and Alice passed him at the door. "I have no wish to stay—if I shall not intrude."

They nodded with a smile, and he followed them to the drawing-room, for he was, in reality, anxious to get their questions all answered, and his messages delivered.

"Had Gabriel no hope, Captain Trent?" inquired Alice, without introduction, as she stood beside the window, her hands locked before her.

"It is a very hopeless household just at present," he answered, sadly; "but Honor said I must tell you that Sir Edward Graham has great confidence in Mr. Keith's fine and unimpaired constitution, and thinks if he can sleep it may be all right. I fear the other doctors do not agree with him; but still Honor told me to tell you that; and—and she asked me to remind you that the issue is in Kinder Hands than any of ours, and that if—it is a life *worth* praying for," concluded Hervey, brokenly.

"Had Honor seen him?" asked Phoebe, presently.

"Not before I left. I would not wait to see her afterwards, if I could have done so, because Miss Henderson told me that if she lov—if she felt for him, the sight of his suffering would be like death to her. I'm sure it seemed to have had almost that effect upon your husband, Mrs. Myddelton. Now may I try to give you his long message?"

"Phoebe!" cried Alice, as Phoebe moved towards the door at these words, "please do not go. My husband's is no secret message."

Phoebe stopped and turned, blushing as she met Hervey's

gaze, for it betrayed both his appreciation of her thoughtfulness and his pleasure at her return to the group.

The message was soon given ; and then, in softened voices, as they lingered together, they talked still of Royden. But after the subject had been broken by the entrance of the servants with coffee, they each avoided—perhaps in thoughtfulness for the others—a recurrence to it.

“Hervey,” said Phœbe, very much appreciating her novel position of the most useful and important member of the party, “were you not surprised when you heard that Lawrence Haughton had gone abroad ?”

“Not so much surprised as I was when I called for my letters a few hours ago, to find that Theo and her mother go abroad to-morrow. My aunt sends me the information in time for me to call—if I choose.”

“And you will ?” questioned Phœbe, with a quick and inexplicable blush.

“Not I.”

“Can you picture Jane alone at The Larches ?” she asked, with a perceptible lightening of her tone. “Honor is going to ask her to Abbotsmoor, though she *has* so many times refused to come here.”

“But have you heard the latest news of all ?”

“About whom ?”

“Your ex-guardian’s ex-clerk. My man told me this evening when I called at my rooms. It seems that the day before yesterday Slimp wrote to Mrs. Trent (with whom Lawrence had always had business intercourse), saying that as he had a private communication of great importance to make to her, by which he could save her from heavy financial loss, he should have the pleasure of waiting upon her immediately after his letter. He drove to Harley Street in a hired waggonette, and just as the driver pulled up the horse before my aunt’s door, something frightened the animal, and it shied suddenly. Slimp had been leaning back in his seat at that moment, his neck against the edge of the rails, and the sudden start in that attitude broke his neck. He lived for an hour, and spent that hour in a vain and horrible effort to speak—useless, of course ; and no one will ever know either what important information he had been going to give my aunt, or

what possible confession he might, in that last hour, have wished to make. I don't know, of course," concluded Hervey, "but I fancy the statement he wished to make would have been a betrayal of somebody's confidence, for a purpose of his own; but let us give him the benefit of the doubt, as death overtook him so horribly."

"It was horrible indeed! I remember Lawrence told us he was in London."

"Yes, and, strange to say, my man saw him going from here only a few minutes before he sent the letter to Miss Trent. I cannot understand it."

Nor of course could either of his companions. Of the only two who understood it, one was on the Atlantic, and the other watching beside a sick-bed.

Hervey Trent had decided to go back to Westleigh Towers next day; so, before he left, Alice Myddelton went away to write a letter to her husband.

"And you, Phœbe?" questioned Hervey. "Shall you write to Honor?"

"No, I think not. You can tell her all I could tell, and she will not care to have to read letters now."

He was looking curiously at her, wishing he could have heard or seen her reception of the news of Lawrence Haughton's departure, which she had told him so coolly.

"Phœbe," he asked, standing before her, and laying his soft white hands upon her shoulders, "are you fretting?"

"Fretting! How do you mean, Hervey!"

"I mean—pardon me, Phœbe, because we are such old friends—I mean, are you sorry Haughton has left England?"

A real laugh ran through her lips.

"I did not care at all," she said, honestly; "I cannot even understand now how I *ever* could have cared."

"That's right."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled more by his manner than his words. "It would have been quite natural to have fretted for my old guardian."

"Quite. But still I would rather you did not."

"Why?" she asked, again.

"You would have fretted for him if you had loved him still."

"Of course I should."

"And equally of course I would rather that you did *not* fret."

"I thought it unnatural not to feel it more," she said, only vaguely comprehending Hervey's meaning, yet feeling a quiet sense of happiness steal over her, as she read a new interest in his face and tones.

"Phœbe," he said presently, "do you think that anyone who has spent a good many years of his life loving one person with all his heart would be wrong to end by loving some one else?"

"Why should he be?" she questioned simply.

"And do you think that you could trust anyone who said he loved you, if he owned at the same time that you were not his first love, nor—nor loved quite in the same way?"

"I do not quite understand you," said Phœbe, her face suffused with blushes. "Are you throwing back upon me my old silly love for Lawrence?"

He smiled at the feeble barricade through which the fire of her blushes frankly displayed itself. "I am telling you," he said, growing more and more earnest, "of a love for Honor which I have always nourished without a shade of encouragement. I am telling you that *now* I know this love to be most hopeless, and I am asking you if you think that, having felt this love, I have any right to offer another love elsewhere?"

It is not to be supposed that Phœbe understood his nature sufficiently to see that he had never yet felt deeply enough really to suffer, and that this affection was as likely to be lasting as his first ambitious and persistent love. She only said, in a tone which gave him more hope than could any other reception of his confession,

"No one could help loving Honor."

"Thank you, Phœbe," he exclaimed heartily; "and you see how hopeless that love is for me, because Honor's going to Westleigh Towers shows that she loves some one else."

"Yes."

"I knew before," he added, softly. "And I feel as if I had *always* known it."

"I used to fancy it, but I was never sure until she heard of his illness. And," she added, with a thoughtfulness

which was new to her voice, "none of us, who knew Honor, can believe in the possibility of her loving a second time."

"I never dreamed of that, Phœbe; never. I have put away the old love for ever."

Another pause, and then he gently took her hands, and holding them between his own, asked her one more question.

"Phœbe, we know all about each other, don't we?—even about those other loves which will never be anything more to either of us—and we have been good friends, and we got on well together. I am not quite the vain and idle fellow I used to be, and with Honor's gift of the bank partnership I shall be able to take a comfortable house and live in good style. Phœbe, will you think this over, and when I come back tell me if you would be my wife? I do not ask for your answer now," he added, pitiless for her blushes, as he kept her there before him, "because it would be unfair, as you have not thought it over, and I have; but let your answer be *Yes*, Phœbe."

"I—I forgot something I want to send to Honor," cried Phœbe, and ran from the room in nervous haste.

"It was best to give her time," mused Hervey, encouraging the pleasant consciousness that (won either now or then) Phœbe's answer would be a happy little *Yes*. "It was more fair, and she will tell Honor before I need. She is a good little thing, and very amiable. I'm really glad she is not handsome—like Theo."

CHAPTER XLII.

I would not raise
Deceitful hope; but in His hand, even yet,
The issue hangs, and He is merciful.

SOUTHEY.

A HEAVY, mournful silence brooded over Westleigh Towers, but this silence centred and culminated in the chamber where Royden lay. It was lofty, like all the rooms at the

Towers, but not large. Though handsomely, it was but slightly furnished, and the old carved bed on which he lay was shrouded by no curtains.

Beside this bed sat Honor, in her soft white dress; lovely, in spite of the pity and sadness on her face. At the window, Miss Henderson was spoiling her work with tears, though she sewed on with a nervous persistency.

Shaded from the light, the dark worn face upon the pillows moved to and fro unrestingly.

In the dressing-room beyond the half closed door the nurse sat waiting for a summons, and downstairs the physicians were again consulting; and still again only reaching that one reiterated conclusion,

If he could but sleep!

"Honor!"

The girl's head was raised, and she listened with drawn-in breath. Again a moment of hope, and then her heart sank, as it had sunk a hundred times before, for this was no recognition, only a part of the terrible and persistent delirium through which she sat beside him, in the awful actual pain of her watching and her love, while she was unknown to him, and unheeded.

"Honor—Honor." The whisper, in its intense and passionate entreaty, pierced to every corner of the room. "You said you would not come—here—to my own house. But Mrs. Payte—promised. Come, dear—let me show you—my home. Why stay beside the statue—I remember—Leda and—and who, Honor? We talked about it—you and I—and then you said—you loved me. Ah! I thought the joy would have killed me. But joy never kills—pain kills—and fire. Put your hand upon my head—Honor—and feel—the flame."

But when she laid her soft, cool palm upon his brow, he shrank from her touch, and cried how quickly the waves rose.

"Honor—Honor!"

So the name, hour after hour, broke the silence; sometimes whispered very low in his exhaustion, and sometimes uttered passionately in fevered strength.

Yet when she knelt beside him, and met his restless eyes, he only whispered, with a smile, that she was safe with him and he would bring Gabriel back.

Pleadingly sometimes she called him by his Christian name, stroking his hot and restless hands or holding them gently to her lips. But still he did not know her ; and, gazing into her troubled face, would cry for Honor still. Sometimes he rose and pushed her from him with a sudden momentary strength ; but sometimes he lay as motionless as death, his eyes so unnaturally large and bright, fixed where she could not follow them.

Scene after scene from his past life he lived again in this delirium, but only a very few of them could Honor comprehend. She knew when he was cheering and encouraging Alice ; she knew when he was answering Lawrence Haughton's base suspicions, and she knew when he was telling Gabriel how surely his innocence would one day be acknowledged. But worst of all it was to hear him hastening his horse through the rising flood of waters, and to see him hold his clasped hand for hours on his breast, guarding Gabriel's secret.

Now he was pitiful, now angry, now troubled, and now glad. Now he would lie for hours, as if wrapped closely in one all-engrossing thought, and now he would wake the echoes of the silent house with quick, clear laughter. It was a terrible time for all the watchers, but far the most terrible for Honor ; and still that sleep upon which the physicians built their only hope seemed as far off as ever. At last there came a day when Honor, watching as ever, fancied she saw a change in the thin, dark face. Royden had called her softly once or twice, and when her eyes met his, so closely and so yearningly, his closed ; and she fell upon her knees and prayed that this might be sleep. Dr. Franklin entered the room just then, but, after one glance, passed back without a sound. Miss Henderson dropped her work, and sat utterly motionless, as if a breath would wake him. Gabriel stopped on the spot where he had stood when Honor's sign arrested him : and Honor, still on her knees beside the bed, hardly dared to draw her breath. Ah ! such a relief it had been to see the lids fall upon those wide and fevered eyes.

So, in hushed and breathless silence, they waited ; no one near the bed save Honor, who knelt just where his gaze could fall upon her when he awoke. "If he awoke," as

Dr. Franklin said. So, minute after minute and hour after hour went by, and Sir Edward Graham sent various telegrams to patients in London and let the trains pass without him. For more than a week now there had been no deeper hush at night over the great house than there had been in the day ; but to-night the silence was so intense that that past silence seemed as nothing. Miss Henderson shuddered in her stillness, remembering Dr. Franklin's " If," and knowing the silence could not be deeper—even then.

Gabriel Myddelton, leaning against the curtained window, in an attitude of intense stillness and watchfulness, never moved his eyes from that sleeping face. Would the waking ever come ? Would there be recognition at last in the fevered eyes, and light upon the dazed brain ? Without the faintest movement, Honor knelt beside the bed, her eyes patient and beautiful even in their agony of fear, her hands clasped, and her whole heart pleading with her Father.

So the hours passed on, and the silence of the room was only broken by that fitful breathing.

" Ah ! "

It was Sir Edward's voice, she knew, though it was only a half breathed whisper. She knew in an instant what it meant, for she had herself seen something which prepared her for it—Royden was awaking. Moved by an impulse which she could not resist, Honor covered her face. After all that had gone before, the suspense of those few moments was unbearable. A sudden pause in the fitful breathing ; then one word, uttered in an awed and wondering whisper,

" Honor ! "

But that whisper told her that the light had come, and that he knew her.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Here she comes!
In the calm harbour of whose gentle breast,
My tempest-beaten soul may safely rest.

DRYDEN.

THE crisis had past! Who can tell the magic of those words, until—without one gleam of hope—they have watched the fierce and awful contest between life and death?

It was not for many hours after Royden's recognition of Honor that they dared to leave her alone with him. A whole night and day passed, while he lay quite still, his breath calm now, though very faint; his eyes always following Honor's form if she moved about the room, or cleaving to her face when she was beside him. But when the quiet evening-time came round once more, the two were left alone together.

Then her long and bitter penitence found words, and very quietly, because all excitement was dangerous for him, and very humbly, she begged him to forgive her that, though she had loved him dearly for two years, she had been perverse and doubting, and had let him fancy that she did not care for him. Without mentioning Theodora's name, she told him just a little of the true cause of her avoidance of him; but the blame was all for herself in this confession. She told him that never since that autumn afternoon, when he had told her that he loved her, had she dreamed of any other love; and that—even if he had not been true to her—she must still have been all her life true to her own unconfessed love. She told him that these last terrible days had shown her that he had cared for her through all, but even the pain which she had given him was less than the pain which she had given herself.

All this, and more, she told him, her low voice stirred and broken in its earnestness and humility; and though for so long he did not answer her one word, she understood the love and happiness which lay within his eyes, and the

depth and earnestness of those few words of gratitude which he whispered while his wasted hands closed over hers.

Though slow, Royden's recovery was steady; and presently the day came for Honor to leave him. He lay at the window in his dressing-room, still very weak, though suffering little pain now; and Honor, dressed to start, had come back to linger with him to the last minute. As she came up to him, he rose and walked a few steps to meet her.

"My sunbeam!" he said, "my captured sunbeam, how can I spare you even for this little time?"

"Because it is only for a little time," she answered, with a smile for him, although the sorrow of this first parting saddened her eyes.

"I have been trying," he said, as they stood together at the window, his thin hands wrapping hers, and his great love even strengthening his worn face, "to accustom myself to the vacant chair, and to the knowledge that the form and face I love are only here in memory."

"But I did not give you time to succeed, did I?" she questioned, brightly. "I could not spare a minute from this last hour."

"Honor, my sweet, when will you come—home?"

Very simply and earnestly she answered, while the bright pink spread softly from cheek to brow under his yearning gaze.

"When you come for me, Royden."

"Even yet it seems too good to be possible," he said, with a long-drawn breath, while his eyes left her face for the first time, and strayed out among the plenteous summer leaves; "for life to have been given back to me in such fulness, and with it the greatest blessing life can hold! A few minutes ago I almost fancied I was going to awake and find that this had been the delirium of fever."

"*That* delirium," she said, touching his cheek softly with her fingers, while a shadow stole into her eyes even at the mention of it, "has passed for ever, Roy, and God has given us to each other."

And at her touch his gaze came back, and his weak arms were folded about her, strong for that moment in their sense of ownership.

A call under the open window, but Honor only looked down with a nod and smile, while she tempted Royden back to his couch.

"Hervey thinks, as he has come on purpose to fetch me, that he must give me constant reminders of the time," she said, with a laugh; "but I shall trust to Gabriel. He is there with Hervey, and he says there is no need of haste."

"Gabriel knows how precious every moment is to me."

"It will be such a comfort to feel he is with you, Roy; and I will take such care of Alice. But I want to ask you one question before I go? May I?"

"So doubtful, is it not, my sweet?"

"I want," she said, her face and voice both full of earnestness,—please to understand me, Royden—I want old Myddelton's money to go to old Myddelton's heir."

"Who is that?"

"Gabriel, of course. He is the only Myddelton; and he ought to go back to Abbotsmoor, and make the old name loved and honoured there."

"Honor, my darling, the power to distribute this wealth was put by old Mr. Myddelton himself into his sister's hands, and she chose you. Gabriel was *not* disinherited. He was to have the same chance as you all had."

"Yes; but he never had it, because of the injustice which had banished him. But for that, Royden, I am sure that Lady Lawrence would have been the very first to acknowledge his prior claim."

"True, dear one; but the fact stands. She left it in no whim, but with sound judgment, built on long thought and observation."

"You are only tempting me, I think, or trying me," she said, with a pleading touch upon his arm.

"Am I?" he asked, with his rare smile.

"Yes; and I believe you really think, as I do, that Gabriel Myddelton must have Abbotsmoor, and his uncle's wealth."

"His name is freed from reproach," said Royden, "and can now be borne uprightly. He has sufficient to buy a little estate to hold himself and Alice, and to keep sorrow from the door. He tells me that is the extent of his ambition."

So, even if you offered him this gift, you would only hear him refuse it. For years he has believed in the old legend of there being a curse on old Myddelton's money, and one can see, even yet, the traces of his old timidity and self-trust."

"Royden, I'm *sure* you are jesting or teasing me. Gabriel cannot really believe that old superstition ; and does he not know now that *you* will help him ? He cannot shrink from wealth because of its evil, when you have unconsciously shown him its good. Roy, you are the friend to whom he will always listen, so you will join me in urging this ?"

"Honor, my darling, if anything could kill the old superstition in his mind, it would be the knowledge he is gaining now of what old Myddelton's money has been in your hands."

"I have never even lived at Abbotsmoor yet," said Honor, blushing vividly. "The work there has to be begun. I am so glad it is for him to begin."

"Is there anywhere you have lived where they could not tell of help, and comfort, and relief, which old Myddelton's money, passing through these gentle hands, has given ? My sweet, look up ; I will not pain you even by words so true. But, remember, the money was entrusted to you by one who was deeply anxious for it to do good. And remember how many noble and generous plans you have begun to work out."

"Gabriel is very earnest and very generous," said Honor, softly, as she rose. "I know—as well as I know how unjustly persecuted he has been—that he will wisely and kindly use that wealth which ought naturally to be his. Abbotsmoor must be Gabriel's, of course ; and, Roy, I think you were only tempting me in jest, because you know there can be really no doubt about it."

"There can be really a great deal of doubt about it," put in Royden, looking into her face with a pride which he tried in vain to hide, as he maintained his argument still. "Gabriel will be the first to see this doubt, and all the world will see it afterwards."

"Don't you think," she asked, softly, "that he will rather see that duty bids him make the old name loved and honoured in the old home ? Royden, I know you will help me to persuade him."

"I am afraid I shall," he said looking down upon her with untold love and pride. "And if Gabriel does accept it, I am quite sure that, in his gratitude and his new earnestness, he will continue all you have begun. Ah! his summons already. How soon it has come! And—and it will be so selfish to fetch you back to me while I am such a"—

"When you come," she interrupted, laying her fingers on his lips, "I shall be ready, Roy. Good-bye."

"And *this* parting is not sad," he said, his thoughts resting for a moment on another "good-bye" which she had uttered long ago. "Your love is mine now—mine for ever. Oh! my sunbeam, good-bye!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

Es summt, es schwirrt und singt und ringt.

SUCH a wedding it was!

Miss Trent tossed aside the papers when they reached her in Baden-Baden, and, with much sarcastic embellishment, told an English gentleman that night at *table-d'hôte* that Mr. Keith of Westleigh Towers had outwitted the less diplomatic candidates for old Myddelton's money.

"On the 30th inst., at Statton, by the Rev. Walter Romer, Honor Craven, to Royden Keith of Westleigh Towers."

This was the simple announcement which had been sent to the leading papers; but it had not prevented the paragraphs being longer and more glowing elsewhere. The wedding ceremony spun itself through an entire page in each of the rival Kinbury papers, and the dresses and the jewels and the guests were dissected in whole columns of various journals devoted to rank and fashion.

Honor's dress was as elaborately described as if it had lent the bride her beauty, instead of having borrowed its own from hers—as a bride's should. The "charming galaxy of bridesmaids" had a hundred lines to themselves,

over every one of which the chief bridesmaid laughed heartily afterwards, even while the tears stood thickly on her pleasant Dutch face. The "crowd of fashionable guests" were named separately, and admired *en masse*. The village decorations had a minute description, and the gifts were valued at a fabulous sum. And—as is the rule prescribed on such occasions—fewest words of all were bestowed upon the bridegroom; the Kinbury weeklies only touching upon his recent illness, and the London dailies alluding casually to the probability of his leaving his mark upon the times.

Sir Philip and Lady Somerson returned from abroad on purpose to have their favourite married from Somerson Castle; and it was in consequence of their determination that Honor could not carry out her anxious proposal for a quiet wedding.

They filled their beautiful country seat with that "crowd of fashionable guests" which the papers delighted to catalogue. They supported the "charming galaxy of bridesmaids" by a noble phalanx of young manhood. They employed the whole village in bearing flowers to and fro for the decorations of the church, and park, and village street; and yet they never fancied they had done enough to make this wedding-day a festival.

And at Statton Rectory, both Mr. and Mrs. Romer laughed heartily over Honor's impossible desire for a quiet wedding. Royden had come the day before to stay with them, and, from early morning, the village had been filled by Westleigh people, who had travelled here to see the marriage of their master. In spite of the three hundred walking-sticks which had always rankled in Sir Philip's breast, he threw the park open all the afternoon to these men who cheered so heartily when Honor passed among them in her youth and beauty, and these women who so warmly prayed, "God bless him," when Royden led her through the crowd.

Earnestly Gabriel Myddelton echoed the prayer, as he and Alice walked from the church slowly, step by step, in the long line of guests, while the joyous notes of the organ came surging through the porch and followed them.

"Ay, God bless them both!" murmured the rector, as the bells clashed out across the autumn landscape, and there

came into his mind a few words of one of those poets whose verses were but feebly linked about the memory of his college days :—

Naught but love can answer love,
And render bliss secure.

No. it certainly had *not* been a quiet wedding, and Pierce was not the only one who smiled at the notion, when the excitement was at its ebb, and the travelling carriage rolled down the avenue of Somerson Park, followed by countless and curious missiles. Pierce sat beside the young Italian courier, looking down upon the four grey horses and the scarlet-clad postilions, but still he had an ever ready word or glance for the two women who sat together in the roomy seat behind him ; one of these being Marie Verrien, proud to feel that she was as much Honor's maid as was the pleasant girl who lavished constant care and kindness upon her, and never allowed her to realise the fact that her employment was merely an agreeable sinecure. This sojourn-abroad—which was to restore to Royden his old strength—was also to give the finishing touch to the benefit which Marie had derived from the life of ease and happiness which she had spent in Honor's home.

CHAPTER XLV.

Oh ! the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed
Around our incompleteness ;
Round our restlessness His rest.

E. B. BROWNING.

THEY are the Westleigh bells which are now having it all their own way with the summer echoes, and telling their tale to the wind and waves, which, in their turn, laugh over it among the rocks and leaves.

Two months have passed since, from the tower of Statton

Church, rang out the tidings of their marriage, and Royden and Honor are on their way home to receive this greeting. It breaks upon them brightly and musically as they drive into sight of the high towers above the sea, but Honor turns and hides her face upon her husband's shoulder then, because she sees that treacherous bay where he was found four months ago, and carried home as dead.

The watchers see the carriage now, and a signal gun is fired out across the sea. Then, even more merrily still, the bells peal out ; and presently a band, which Royden himself organised long ago, among the "mill-hands," marches to meet them. Now rises the cheering of hundreds of voices, and in a few minutes the horses are gone ; and, to the music of the cornets and the voices and the bells—all harmonised by loyalty and summer gladness—their own people wheel the carriage to the door.

The upturned faces greet them in a mass, when they turn and pause in the arched doorway. Royden thanks them for their cordial greeting ; and while they answer each sentence with a deafening cheer, they notice how the very mention of his wife brings a wondrous light into his eyes, beyond that permanent light of happiness which dwells there now.

And other friends have gathered within The Towers to welcome Royden and Honor ; friends whom we shall look upon to-day for the last time.

There are Sir Philip and Lady Somerson, cordial as of old. There is Mrs. Romer, bent, as of old, on making a favourite of Honor ; and Mr. Romer recalling with a smile of self-congratulation how, from the first, he had acknowledged Royden Keith worthy of a hearty and profound respect. There is Sir Edward Graham, beaming as if he had never looked on anguish such as that which he had witnessed in this spot just three months ago. There is Dr. Franklin, uncharacteristically hopeful. There is the old vicar of Westleigh, confidentially asserting that there never has been such a scene as this in the village since he came to live here fifty years ago. There is his young curate, in whose wake comes a grave little lad who, for months now, has not only eagerly devoured the lessons that he gives (the payment for which doubles the young curate's salary), but has been with him ever in his walks and in his work. The boy's face

flushes and brightens into perfect beauty when Royden, laying a gentle hand upon his shoulder, tells Honor, "This is Margaret Territ's child," and Honor stoops and kisses him.

There are Phœbe and Miss Henderson, come together from the Kensington mansion, where Phœbe is preparing for her wedding, in a state of happiness unusually calm and quiet; while Hervey makes ready that London house where she will enjoy her drives and dresses—as well as better things—and be thoroughly happy in her kindly, simple, and prosaic way. There is Hervey, reading a new translation of his old code of etiquette; the tones which used to be so slow and faultless stirred and broken now as he thanks Honor for that gift of Deergrove which she bought for him and Phœbe when Mrs. Trent saw it best to leave the old neighbourhood—not that Hervey values the little estate for its memories so much as for its proximity to Honor's home; and because it is such a relief to him to feel that he need not live only in London all the year round; even though his new employment is easy and pleasant to him. There is Gabriel Myddelton, inexpressibly happy as a well-employed country squire; proud to hear the congratulations which are given him on the manner he is carrying out—in earnest zeal—the work Honor began at Abbotsmoor; and using wisely and kindly the half of old Myddelton's money which was all his cousin could succeed in winning him to accept. There is Alice, well and strong again, because no secret presses on her now, and her husband's name is loved and respected.

So those belonging to the old life are all here, save four. Mrs. Trent and Theodora are moving restlessly from place to place upon the continent; unforgiving (as those often are, to whom the wrong is due); and Lawrence Haughton's sister is on her way to join him in Melbourne. At his first invitation—honestly though curtly given—Jane left the house in which she had grown to middle-age; sold the household gods which for years she had guarded so jealously, and sailed to a new, strange world for the sake of this brother to whom—through good and evil—she had all her life clung faithfully. Hard and cold she had been ever, but still there ran through the flint this one pure vein of gold.

The silence of the autumn night has settled down upon

The Towers. Alone at last, Honor lingers at the window in her dressing-room ; the curtains drawn back, and the October moonlight falling softly upon her, as she stands there, still and lovely, in her long white dress.

"Sweet, do you feel that this is really home?"

Royden has come up to her so quietly that his words seem only a part of that long, happy thought.

"Our home, Roy ; where your love will make me happy beyond words ; and where I will try"—

"And fail," he interrupts, kissing her tenderly, as she nestles within his arms, "you *have* made me happy for all time. You need never try again."

She does not turn her eyes from the moonlit sea, but they are filled with a deep and full content. How can even she herself help feeling the difference her love has made in his life, always so full of generous deeds and purposes, but now so full of happiness besides?

"What a welcome they have given us," she whispers presently. "It filled my heart with deepest gratitude to see how you have made your people love you ; and I know how it is, Roy. In your daily life, and hourly intercourse with others—I mean in *little* things as well as great, by trifles which so many of us do not think of—you have won a love which only such a life as yours can win, my husband, and which never can be otherwise than warm and true."

"Honor," he says, lifting her face that he may read his happiness within her eyes, "do you know that Gabriel—and not Gabriel alone—has been speaking to me in just such words of you. My darling, are you satisfied with all you hear of Abbotsmoor, and the working of your plans and projects?"

"Far more than satisfied."

"And you will let me help you here, in your own share of the work?"

"Royden, as if I could ever think of anything good which *you* have not thought of long before!"

"Do you remember that first day we spent at Abbotsmoor, Honor, when it was deserted, and the shadow of a great crime lay upon it? Do you remember how we talked of that old superstition of a curse hanging over the miser's

wealth, while neither you nor I could guess in whose hands would lie the task of scattering it ? ”

“ Or, whose would lift that shadow of crime from the old name. ”

“ The task is not finished, is it ? It will only finish with our lives. But can we not feel to-night, mine own dear wife, that at last there rests a blessing only upon old Myddelton's money ; and that day by day, through all our grateful lives, the blessing may grow and brighten ? ”

She laughs a happy little laugh, and lifts her arms and clasps them softly round his neck.

“ Oh, Royden, who, in all the world, has greater cause to try to make others happy than I, who am so happy and so blest ! ”

THE END.

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